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School Climate and Demographic Factors' Influence on Seventh-Grade Students' Perceptions of Bullying in Arkansas Public Schools

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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS' INFLUENCE ON SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING IN ARKANSAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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Man must evolve for all human conflict a method, which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love. –Martin Luther King, Jr.

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ABSTRACT

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Title: School Climate and Demographic Factors' Influence on Seventh-Grade Students' Perceptions of Bullying in Arkansas Public Schools (Under the direction of Dr. Usen Akpanudo)

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of an authoritative school climate on perceptions of bullying among middle school students after controlling for demographic characteristics. In this quantitative nonexperimental study, 320 seventh-grade students were selected from four public middle schools in Arkansas using a multistage sampling technique. The Authoritative School Climate Survey was used to obtained data on the students' perceptions of their school climate (disciplinary structure and support systems), their demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, and school location) as well as their perceptions about bullying in the following areas: (a) prevalence of teasing and bullying, (b) prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, (c) aggressive attitudes, and (d) bullying experiences. Hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis revealed that although demographic characteristics explained some of the variations in perceptions about bullying, perceptions about school climate was the single most important factor in predicting perceptions about bullying. These findings have implications for school leaders trying to understand the problem of bullying at the middle

school level. The findings also provide empirical support for the Authoritative School Climate Theory, which suggests that school climate has an important influence on student behavior.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Relationships among middle school students are impacted by a variety of factors. These relationships can be either positive or negative. One of the most common negative interactions in middle schools is bullying. Donegan (2012) noted that children have a natural instinct to act in unethical ways to outshine other children. The competitive environment of education can provide an atmosphere where these unethical behaviors occur. Bloom (2001) found victimization was linked to an innate desire for revenge, which caused victims of violent actions to inflict their own pain upon others. Likewise, Wiatrowski, Griswold, and Roberts (1981) described social control theory as conforming behavior to what society expects. The structure of school may assist in fostering conformity of students with the instruction to follow rules and obey school leaders. Boman, Krohn, Gibson, and Stogner (2012) noted weak, fragile relationships free people from social constraints, which can cause delinquency. In other words, students who have no meaningful social ties might act out aggressively in bullying behaviors.

Whatever the reasons for bullying, these reasons constitute a pressing problem for many school age children, their parents, and educators. On April 20, 1999, two high school students who had been alleged victims of bullying during their lives took revenge on their classmates at Columbine High School in Colorado (Haan & Mays, 2013). The two students wounded 23 people and fatally shot 13 people before they took their own

lives as law enforcement officers approached them. Reportedly, the shooters were victims of society with weakened relationships with peers, teachers, and parents. Their interactions with members of society were also nonexistent (Mongan, 2013). Accordingly, the American Psychological Association (n.d.) found that children who are bullied have higher levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness; are more likely to attempt suicide; and more likely to avoid school. Using these warning signs, educators generally provide assistance before school violence occurs. Nevertheless, Mongan (2013) proclaimed that since the Columbine tragedy, multiple similar incidents have occurred involving schools and students across America.

The two types of bullying are direct (physical) and indirect (spreading rumors). The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2016) defined bullying as unwanted behavior between adolescents that involves real or perceived imbalance of power and is generally repeated over time. Advancements in technology have helped expand indirect bullying, creating the new phenomenon known as cyberbullying. Based on cyberbullying, harassment no longer occurs only in schools from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Harassment occurs 24 hours a day, seven days a week on the Internet (Allanson, Lester, & Notar, 2015; Brooks, 2014). Victims experience the most physiological damage based on the fact that cyberbullying can be anonymous, which causes victims to have heightened levels of stress (Runk, 2006). Social media outlets have helped boost the bullying epidemic in the United States to a level where parents, educators, and other authority figures do not know how to stop bullying and its effects (Williams, 2014). Findings from research have indicated that bullying behaviors peak in late childhood,

making prevention and intervention programs crucial for middle school students (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandra, & Guffey, 2012).

The perception of the prevalence of teasing and bullying, prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences may differ among middle school students. Mongan (2013) found that perceptions change based on exposure to the coverage of an event performed by the news media. Students' perceptions may also differ based on their experiences with bullying. According to Baier (2007), bullies have a misinterpreted perception of others' intentions. For instance, if a student accidently spills a bully's drink, the bully may perceive that movement as purposeful and take violent steps toward that student. An innocent student that has witnessed this type of retaliation may have a different perception of bullying than other students. Likewise, a student with a negative experience of seeking help such as being called a tattletale or a nark may have a different perspective compared to those students with a more positive experience. Experiences may change the way someone perceives behavior.

Statement of the Problem

To gain a clearer understanding of bullying, the influence of school climate must be considered as well as the relevant demographic factors that may help explain middle school students' perceptions of or experiences with bullying. The purposes of the current study were therefore four-fold:

1. To determine the extent to which school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) contribute to the prediction of perceptions of the prevalence of bullying among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).

2. To determine the extent to which school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) contribute to the prediction of perceptions of bullying by teachers/staff among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).
3. To determine the extent to which school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) contribute to the prediction of the self-reported aggressive attitudes of seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).
4. To determine the extent to which school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) contribute to the prediction of the self-reported bully experiences of seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).

Background

Bullying behaviors vary with the intended purposes, deliveries, and reactions of the victims. Research on bullying began in the 1970s, but evidence of bullying has been recorded for centuries. Allanson et al. (2015) noted, "The Bible is riddled with references to violence festered by the spirit of bullying" (p. 31). For instance, a rivalry existed between Joseph and his brothers over their father's love and attention. The brothers' greed for dominance over Joseph provided a clear representation of bullying and its ancient existence.

Due to the implications of unwanted behaviors, bullying has been studied extensively. Olweus (2010) has dedicated his life to assisting school administrators and students in a bullying prevention program, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.

According to Limber (2011), this bullying prevention program showed positive results among students who attended schools when the prevention curriculum was implemented. The program provides students awareness of bullying and statements to use against unwanted behaviors. Researchers Cornell and Sheras (2003) have expanded upon this work and developed a tool used by many school administrators to measure disciplinary structure and student support, the School Climate Bullying Survey. Recently, the School Climate Bullying Survey was renamed the Authoritative School Climate Survey (ASCS), because studies have indicated that school climate is a factor that influences the perception of bullying.

School Climate

School climate is the overall character of school life, including teaching and learning, practices, priorities, structure, norms, values, and relationships (American Psychological Association, n.d.). The climate of a school can be positive or negative, depending on the vision of the administrators and how much the staff shares that vision (Hughes & Pickerel, 2013). According to Thapa et al. (2012), administrators who foster a positive school climate understand that school climates are used to provide social, emotional, and physical support to their teachers, parents, and students. O'Brennan and Bradshaw (2013) claimed support must be combined with a vision of respect created by the whole educational system. Thapa et al. (2012) proposed that in positive school climates administrators and teachers have strong motivations to teach, disregard the negative influences of socioeconomic status on academic success, and report less aggression and violence on their campuses. Furthermore, positive school climates nurture

an environment where students feel school is a safe place (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). A foundational piece of a high functioning school may be school climate.

Successful school climates are referenced as positive or authoritative. In this study, a positive school climate will also be referred to as an authoritative school climate. An authoritative climate is commonly used with parenting styles; however, research indicates the climates created by authority figures in both home and school have similar effects on children (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011). Educators with characteristics mirroring authoritative parenting styles, high disciplinary structure and high support, had students who were engaged in the learning task and cooperative within the classroom (Gregory et al., 2011). In this type of climate, Jia, Konald, and Cornell (2015) agreed students have better attendance records, are more motivated to succeed academically, engage in more cooperative learning with their peers, and achieve higher test scores. Authoritative school climates could have significant positive effects on student achievement.

The lack of high structure and high support may cultivate a climate that encourages unwanted behavior toward others. Wang et al. (2014) found that nonauthoritative climates are connected to destructive behaviors and bullying. Along with authoritative parenting, there is also authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting. These parenting styles create climates in which children live. Gregory et al. (2011) acknowledged authoritarian parenting would be defined as high disciplinary structure with low support while permissive parenting would be defined as low disciplinary structure with high support. Both of these climates foster a negative

environment as a result of either extreme authority or extreme leniency. Authoritarian and permissive climates would be considered nonauthoritative climates.

Characteristics of Bullies and Victims

Bullying is an interaction between bullies and victims. The Internet has been used to increase the influence and nature of bullying. Runk (2006) stated with more than four million children posting content to the web, the number of bullying victims continues to increase. Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, and Brick (2010) noted that females are more likely to be targets of indirect bullying, such as cyberbullying. Currently, the issue of cyberbullying continues to increase because many of the approaches suggested to solve the problem are not working (Halstead, 2015), which is primarily based on the many different avenues available for bullies to inflict harm on their victims.

Bullies have more ways to reach their victims in modern society. With advancements in technology, several ways to attack a victim exist, including e-mail, blogs, text messages, websites, camera phones, instant messages, digital images, and message boards (Runk, 2006). The best and worst character traits of people have been amplified by technology (Heick, 2014). According to Thapa et al. (2012), bullying and harassment have moved to the virtual school, where students now use social media accounts to harass their peers. Runk (2006) explained that students use information technologies to send threatening or violent messages intended to intimidate, tease, generate rumors, or ridicule others as well as to cause verbal, emotional, or psychological hurt. Donegan (2012) and Runk (2006) cautioned the members of society have a duty to educate students about their First Amendment rights and how certain acts and misuse of tools may be considered criminal and punishable by law. Informing students that all

actions and behaviors have consequences may cause some individuals to think before committing bullying acts, specifically using today's technology.

Bullies may appear to be troubled, yet be manipulative and intelligent. Swearer and Hymel (2015) stated that children who bully others show higher levels of aggression, exploitation of others, drug and alcohol abuse, and delinquent and criminal behavior than other children. Runk (2006) and Sticca and Perren (2013) agreed bullies use social media sites such as FaceBook®, Twitter®, and Instagram® to showcase their manipulation in an effort to disseminate messages to large groups of people quickly and to make the harassment more emotionally damaging because of the publicity. Bullies use social media as a platform to victimize others using their skill, wit, and many times aptitude to deceive others.

Additionally, victims tend to have certain characteristics. Officials from the American Psychological Association (n.d.) pointed out that bullied children can be categorized with different social issues including disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, weight, ethnicity, and religion. Baier (2007) cited victims are often perceived as being different or odd based on their lack of social skills. In addition, Runk (2006) warned the impact of bullying on victims causes serious emotional harm and leads to low self-esteem, anger, fear, depression, school violence, anxiety, smoking/drinking, low attendance, and social isolation. Williams (2014) cautioned that while society works toward resolution of how a bully develops and how to prevent bullying, there must be a plan for online bullying prevention as well. Additional support may be needed to educate victims and witnesses with the actions and words to seek help against bullying.

The behaviors can continue without repercussions. O'Brien (2011) specified that bullying issues are not addressed because people look at bullying as someone else's responsibility; therefore, no one steps in to address the issue. Moreover, Milsom and Gallo (2006) found when bullies feel no one will intervene and no consequence will occur for their actions, they continue damaging behaviors. Unfortunately, Masters (2016) found the way people handle bullying may depend on their ability to take a stand against unwanted behaviors. The bullies may continue their behaviors until victims and witnesses make a move, proving that bullying rears negative consequences.

Although the majority of bullies are male, gender still plays a role in the type of bullying that is more likely to occur. Milsom and Gallo (2006) disclosed that girls often participate in social bullying, while boys often engage in physical or verbal bullying. Often, girls are threatened by their social status, while boys are more concerned about power (Milsom & Gallo, 2006; Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015). The type of bullying may change based on gender, although both boys and girls participate in unwanted behaviors.

Supporting Students Against Bullying

Victims rarely seek support after a bullying experience. Runk (2006) found that 58% of students who were bullied did not tell their parents or other adults including teachers. Halstead (2015) disclosed many victims are afraid to speak up and report bullying based on fear of retaliation. Brooks (2014) acknowledged that efforts should be made to empower students to use their own voices against bullying. Speaking up may be a powerful tool to combat bullying.

To gain support against bullying, victims may need more confidence. Milsom and Gallo (2006) found victims benefit from interventions and programs that help to increase self-esteem. In addition, Milsom and Gallo have found that victims who develop assertiveness toward bullies have seen reductions in bullying. More importantly, Mendler (2013) claimed that the main solution lies with the children, not with the adults. Because victimization usually occurs when no adults are around, members of communities must empower children to stand up for themselves against bullies (Brooks, 2014). Building self-esteem in children may assist against bullying in schools.

Interactions between bullies and victims generally occur in public places; thus, witnesses are generally present. Even online accounts are viewed by others, which can guarantee a multitude of witnesses. Williams (2014) indicated 40% of school bullying is unreported by victims or by witnesses. Evidence indicates that underreported bullying is the primary cause for the uncontrolled growth of bullying in America today (Williams, 2014). Williams cautioned that witnesses of online harassment have a responsibility to report it to a capable adult. In addition, O'Brien (2011) urged teachers, students, and parents to empower witnesses to report bullying by training them to identify and respond to inappropriate behaviors. Witnesses can help by standing up to all types of bullying, even online bullying.

Encouraging students to challenge bullying may have beneficial effects. Brooks (2014) found that being confronted by peers, instead of administrators, was a powerful solution that left an impression on many bullies. In fact, Brooks found giving students a leadership role to protect their peers helped to create new relationships, which made the living and learning environment safer for both students and adults.

Partnerships Between School and Home

Partnerships between schools, homes, and communities may provide additional disciplinary structure and student support against bullying. Experts at the National Association of School Psychologists (Williams, Boyle, White, & Sinko, 2010) revealed that support from parents increases the opportunity for student academic and emotional growth. Mendler (2013) found that support against bullying requires an equal partnership between school officials and parents in providing frequent reminders of the harmful impact caused by hurtful words and actions. In addition, O'Brien (2011) declared parents and guardians of students are the school officials' best allies to bullying prevention. Equally important, Halstead (2015) mentioned students need to see community members outside of the school environment join together to support anti-bullying efforts. As a society, Williams (2014) asserted people must educate one another about bullying and the lasting damage it causes. The cooperation among all community members can be used to decrease bullying.

Parents that have a good relationship with their children build knowledge, self-esteem, and confidence to stand against bullying. O'Brien (2011) observed that parents must communicate effectively with their children to provide comfort in discussions about bullying. Concisely, O'Brien stressed parents and guardians must have a relationship with their children that teaches kindness and empathy to promote confidence and assertiveness to stand against unwanted behaviors. O'Brien felt that parents must coach their children on what actions to take and not to take. No doubt, Halstead (2015) proposed that the language parents use plays a significant role in how children view themselves and their abilities to take a stand in confidence. In short, O'Brien (2011)

stressed parents and guardians must have a relationship with their children that teaches kindness and empathy instead of teasing and hurtful behaviors toward others, and promotes confidence and assertiveness to stand against unwanted behaviors. The connection made between parents and their children may be an important tool to build awareness of bullying. Modeling of words and actions by parents may be beneficial in providing children the behaviors and skills they need in society.

Other behaviors parents may need to model involve technology. Runk (2006) notes that parents should model appropriate use of computers and applications, know the websites that their children visit, impose proper consequences, and discuss the fact that computer identities can be traced. Parents that model proper social media etiquette can eliminate many cyberbullying attacks due to expectations and behaviors set at home.

With technological advances increasing the severity and overall impact of bullying, education may be more important than ever to empower youth with the behaviors and skills to stand against the unwanted and repeated behaviors of bullying. Creating an authoritative climate in schools and homes may be the catalyst that provides consequences to hinder such behaviors. This study is important to and necessary for deterring bullying of all types.

Hypotheses

Evidence from the literature confirms school climate is a key influence on the prevalence of bullying in school settings. The literature further indicates that school climate in the form of disciplinary structure and student support are likely to influence children's perception of behavior at their schools. Finally, the literature provides strong indications that gender, ethnicity, and school location also meaningfully impact

incidences of bullying among middle school children. Unfortunately, the literature provides limited evidence of the combined impact of these factors on perceptions regarding the prevalence of bullying or the help-seeking behaviors against bullying by middle school children. Furthermore, limited inquiry has been conducted to understand the unique influence of school climate after variations in perceptions about bullying attributable to demographic characteristics have been determined. As was the purpose of this study to fill this gap in the knowledge base, the following null hypotheses were developed:

1. The combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of perceptions of the prevalence of bullying among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).
2. The combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of perceptions of the prevalence of bullying by teachers among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).
3. The combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of the self-reported aggressive attitudes of seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).

4. The combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of self-reported bully experiences of seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).

Description of Terms

Aggressive attitudes. Gabbey and Jewell (2016) indicated aggressive attitudes are actions that violate social boundaries because they are destructive in nature. Milsom and Gallo (2006) cited aggressive attitudes as emotions that seek to cause physical or emotional harm to others. In children, aggressive attitudes develop from poor relationship skills, underlying health problems, stress, or frustration (Gabbey & Jewell, 2016). For the purpose of this study, aggressive attitudes will be defined as scores on the aggressive attitude scale of the ASCS.

Authoritative school climate. Gregory et al. (2011) defined authoritative schools as having a climate that is highly supportive yet highly structured in both academic and behavioral areas. These areas are set with high expectations by the teachers, administrators, and other support staff members. In this study, *authoritative climate* and *positive climate* will be used simultaneously due to findings in research. For the purpose of this study, authoritative school climate will be defined as the higher of two dimensions in the range of scores making up the school climate scales on the ASCS.

Bullying. A bully is defined by Milsom and Gallo (2006) as a person that oppresses others with unwanted behaviors which are repeated over time. Additionally, officials at the American Psychological Association (n.d.) reported bullying is an act of imbalance of power or strength between the aggressor and the victim.

Bullying takes many forms, including physical, verbal, relational, or cyber (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Examples of physical bullying include kicking, biting, hitting, or shoving others (Milsom & Gallo, 2006). Verbal bullies use words to inflict harm by name-calling, making racist comments, teasing, or speaking insults (Milsom & Gallo, 2006). Milsom and Gallo (2006) noted that relational bullies exclude others from group activities by spreading rumors or making verbal threats. Runk (2006) stated cyberbullies can cause more damage because they can be anonymous and can leave the victim feeling exposed to many people. In this study, bullying will also be synonymous with unwanted behaviors. The primary area of interest was the prevalence of bullying, which will be defined as scores on the prevalence of teasing and bullying scale of the ASCS.

Bullying experiences. Types of bullying experiences are physical bullying (hitting, kicking, or shoving), verbal bullying (teasing, putting down, or insulting someone), social bullying (repeatedly ignoring or leaving others out), or cyberbullying (cell phone, email, or Internet). In this study, bullying experiences consist of events within the last 12 months that happen more than once. For the purpose of this study, bullying experience will be defined as scores on the bullying experience scale of the ASCS.

Middle school. Middle schools consist of fifth grade to eighth grade students with an average age of 12 years ("Middle school," n.d.). In the current study, seventh-grade students were used as a representation of middle school students.

Nonauthoritative school climate. Opposite of authoritative climate, there is authoritarian climate and permissive climate. An authoritarian climate would be defined

as highly structured in discipline with no support, and a permissive climate would be defined as highly supportive with no disciplinary structure. In this study, *authoritarian climate* and *permissive climate* will be combined and described as nonauthoritative climate. Implying that a nonauthoritative climate would have negative impact on students due to findings in research. For the purpose of this study, *nonauthoritative school climate* will be defined as the lower of the two dimensions in the range of scores that make up the school climate scales on the ASCS.

School climate. Thapa et al. (2012) reported that school climate indicates the quality and character of a school environment in the form of values, relationships, interactions, and structures. In addition, values and relationships are often measured by how administrators, teachers, students, and other school personnel interact with one another. Even though *school climate* and school culture are often used concurrently, Maslowski (2001) and Pezone and Singer (2003) defined school culture as a reflection of society and all the diverse values and beliefs that it holds. For the purpose of this study, school climate will be the focus and will be referenced as either authoritative (positive) or nonauthoritative (negative). For the purpose of this study, school climate will be defined as the combined scores on school disciplinary structure scale and the student support subscales of the ASCS.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was derived from the general assumption that bullying occurs in all types of schools, and educators and parents have yet to find interventions that extinguish bullying behaviors. The purpose of the current study was to determine to what extent combining factors such as school climate, gender, ethnicity, and

school location could predict perceptions of the prevalence of bullying, bullying by teachers/staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences.

One significant step would be to educate teachers, building administrators, and district leaders about the importance of an authoritative school climate. On the one hand, literature seems to indicate that an authoritative school climate decreases bullying incidents, and on the other hand, it seems to increase student achievement. The authoritative school climate would provide the disciplinary structure and student support that students and parents respect. With this level of endorsement, school officials could assure that schools function more effectively in educating students because disciplinary structure and student support are both valued.

The next significant step would be educating parents on the importance of authoritative parenting. Supple and Small (2006) reported that children with authoritative parents thrive in their development. Children raised in this climate begin school accustomed to disciplinary structure and student support; therefore, once they step into an authoritative school climate, learning can begin immediately. Children who are raised in different, nonauthoritative environments must learn disciplinary structure and student support prior to learning academics. When children go from authoritative home climates to authoritative school climates, achievement gaps may narrow.

Research Gaps

Evidence was limited to bullying without any specifications regarding school climate, gender, ethnicity, or school location and their extent to predict perception of middle school students. This study was used to fill in the gaps in the literature by examining the roles school climate, gender, ethnicity, and school location have on

bullying and the steps involved in hindering the unwanted behaviors. The findings will be used to help teach educators how to mentor students to prevent or survive bullying in an authoritative school climate along with empowering voice by building self-esteem and confidence.

The current study was used to add to the literature in four areas of focus: prevalence of teasing and bullying, prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences; by school climate, gender, ethnicity, and school location. By providing information on bullying by school climate, gender, ethnicity, and school location, broader literature became available for future use.

Possible Implications for Practice

The completion of the current study was used to provide more information on bullying in middle schools. Researchers seeking findings on school climate and the demographics of middle school students will be able to use the information gleaned to develop intervention programs designed for different school climates, ethnicities, genders, or school locations. Additionally, the information can be used to educate parents and school personnel on bullying and bullying prevention.

Perhaps the most important implication of the current research is for researchers to develop ways to inform students about bullying and the damaging effects the behavior has on the bullies, the victims, and the witnesses. The most-prevalent theme within the research was to develop an authoritative school climate that would empower students to take a stand against bullying. If the current research can be used to bring community leaders, parents, and teachers together to provide all children with high discipline

structure and high student support, all members of society will benefit from the information.

Processes to Accomplish

Design

A quantitative nonexperimental research design was used for this study. Self-reported data were obtained from students at four school districts in the state of Arkansas. School climate (using indicators of disciplinary structure and student support), gender (male and female), ethnicity (Caucasian and non-Caucasian), and school location (rural and urban) served as the predictor variables for all four hypotheses. The outcome variables for the hypotheses were prevalence of bullying, prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences, respectively.

Sample

The study obtained data in the form of perception scores from seventh-grade students at four public school districts in Arkansas. For this study, a convenience sample of 320 students (80 from each school district) was taken. Officials at each of the four school districts assisted in the electronic distribution of the electronic survey.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for the current study was the secondary school version of the ASCS (Cornell, 2011). This instrument captures respondents' experiences and opinions regarding bullying behaviors and school climate. Cornell (2015) has studied violence for 30 years and currently is a forensic clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Virginia. The secondary school version of the ASCS comprises a total of 90 items in 25 subsections. Several of the subsections contain Likert-scaled items that add

up to scores for difference indices or scales related to school climate or bullying. According to Cornell, the survey has been used over 700 times, and substantial evidence exists that this instrument is reliable and valid. Cornell (2011) noted that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient levels were calculated for each category of the survey as follows: prevalence of bullying was $\alpha = 0.79$, and bullying victimization was $\alpha = 0.85$.

Data analysis

To analyze data for this study, hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses were conducted using school climate, gender (male and female), ethnicity (Caucasian and non-Caucasian), and school location (rural and urban) as predictor variables for each of the four hypotheses. The outcome variables for the hypotheses were the prevalence of teasing bullying, prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences, respectively. To test each null hypothesis, a two-tailed test with a .05 level of significance was used.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Adolescence is a time when many school-aged children struggle with interpersonal relationships and adjusting to critical developmental and structural changes in their lives. Kilford, Garrett, and Blakemore (2016) noted that adolescence involves unmistakable social, cognitive, and affective development that cause difficulty in regulating actions and emotions. In addition, Pintado (2006) claims that the middle school environment poses additional and important student-teacher relationship changes for adolescents. For instance, at the middle school level, the teacher role evolves from that of a caregiver for a small group of students to that of an instructional leader for a significantly larger group of students. Adjusting to this relationship change can be very stressful for many school-aged children. Akos (2002) noted that in addition to these relationship changes, structural changes in how school works (new rules and procedures, schedules, lockers, extracurricular activities, crowded halls, and school bells) can cause unfamiliar tension for adolescents in middle school. However, and most importantly, Pintado (2006) suggested that aggression among school-aged children in the form of bullying increases significantly during these adolescent years. Some adolescents will manage to avoid the urge to be hurtful and mean to their peers during these transitions, but many may not escape victimization.

It has been more than 70 years since bullying was researched by Maslow (1943). In his book, *A Theory of Human Emotion*, Maslow proposed that a child must feel safe to prosper (Maslow, 1943). Although Katz and Porath (2011) stated educators are the most influential and effective people in guiding social and emotional learning in our culture, teachers and administrators continue to seek solutions to keep students safe from bullies.

This chapter will provide a review of the extant literature detailing the theoretical framework (See Figure 1) used in this study including social-control theory, connections to society, school culture, and school climate (types of school climate and benefits of school climate). The chapter will also include bullying (bullying types, impact of bullying on academic success, prevalence of teasing and bullying, prevalence in gender, prevalence in different ethnicities, and prevalence in school location and size), seeking support against bullying (seeking help from teachers, seeking help from peers, and witnesses that help), and prevention strategies.

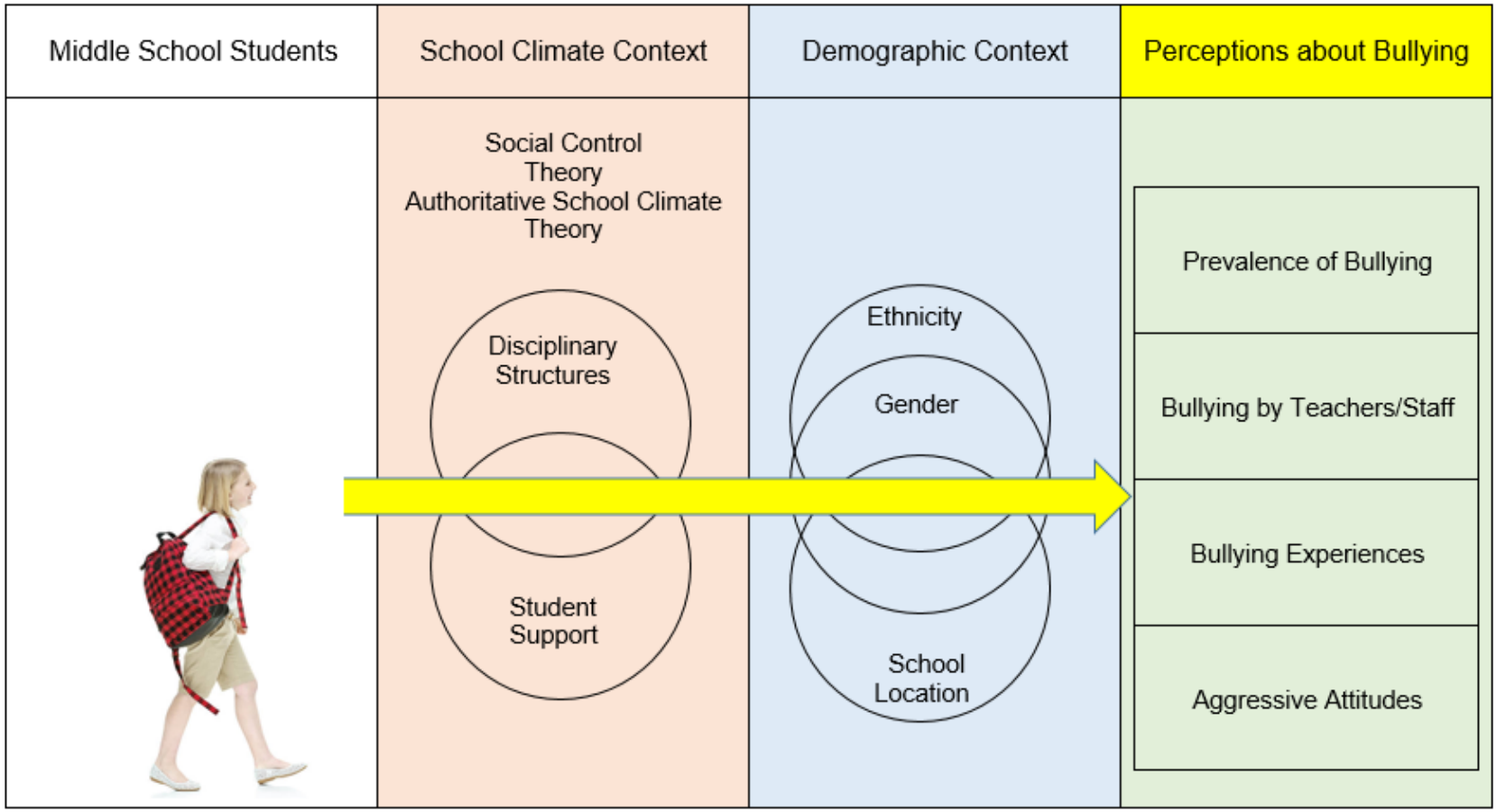

Figure 1. Initial theoretical/conceptual framework of Grade 7 students' perceptions of bullying as influenced by school climate and demographic variables.

Social-Control Theory

Hirschi (1969) claimed that individuals are naturally motivated to deviate. Strong bonds to society restrain inherent desires. Wiatrowski et al. (1981) also summed Hirschi's work by stating that humans are like animals and are intrinsically able to commit criminal acts of violence; therefore, delinquency is intrinsic, and conformity through socialization must be understood. Hirschi (1969) also stated that when an individual's bond to society was weak or broken, he or she was more likely to perform delinquent, or bullying acts, concluding that adolescents who felt that they were a part of society were less likely to commit crimes against their society.

Hirschi (1969) named four elements that encompass a social bond to society, including attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Hirschi defined attachment as connections with others. Based on fear of how people perceived and judged one another, behaviors were conformed to society's norms that would gain approval. Commitment was defined as investments made to a community. Connecting to a community allowed greater incentive toward conformity and against crimes. Involvement was similar to commitment but related more to participation in community activities such as youth sports. The last bond, belief, refers to an agreement with common values a society adopted. Believing in social values allows members of society to conform and cherish the values. Hirschi believed that if the bond among these four elements was strong, delinquent behavior decreased because negative actions were the direct result of a disconnect from society. These four elements are interrelated, not independent of one another.

Becoming a responsible contributor to society is a learned behavior by which parents, educators, peers, and community members have a hand in evolving. Katz and Porath (2011) cautioned that teaching social responsibility to children is as important as teaching mathematics and reading. Allowing positive experiences and bonds to grow within society is essential for all stakeholders when it comes to developing and growing children.

Connections to Society

According to the social-control theory, a lack of attachment may cause antisocial behaviors. Petrie (2014) claimed a strong connection existed between students who did not feel an attachment to schools and the development of antisocial behaviors, according to the social-control theory. The belief was supported by evidence that students' perceptions of their school and experiences influenced their behavior and attitudes, suggesting no desire to gain connections if they were not already formed which leads to antagonistic attitudes.

However, a positive experience with society fostered positive behaviors and attitudes. Petrie (2014) reported that positive environments, for instance school climate, provided positive school perceptions. Just as important, Han, Kim, and Lee (2016) found that positive interactions with parents and teachers resulted in a delay of high-risk behaviors such as drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes. Based on the findings from Petrie (2014) and Han et al. (2016), a positive school climate was an important factor in social development that deterred high-risk behaviors.

Connections in society are made when friendships are formed around shared experiences and values. Knecht, Snijders, Baerveldt, Steglich, and Raub (2010) stated

that social influence was dependent upon complementary behaviors and attitudes. Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, and Dintcheff (2007) found that spending a significant time as a family acted as a protective factor against delinquent behaviors in society. A positive social bond with even a small unit of the community or family may be enough to deter offending actions. In contrast, Knecht et al. (2010) warned adolescents to seek friends who have the same level of delinquency as their own. Barnes et al. (2007) found spending a significant amount of time with peers influenced delinquent behaviors. Students with an excessive amount of peer time could be more likely to find friendship with others who have weakened connections to society.

School Culture

School culture is a reflection of the society it serves. According to Maslowski (2001) and Pezone and Singer (2003), school culture is composed of all the diverse values and beliefs that a society holds. Hongboontri and Keawkhong (2014) defined school culture as a collection of rituals and traditions that have developed over time as stakeholders work together to solve issues and celebrate accomplishments. The culture of a school is an appreciation of differences and a place within societies that holds an obligation to reflect ethical examples of acceptance to all citizens.

School culture and school climate are similar, yet different. Schoen and Teddlie (2008) stated school culture and school climate have little differences. School culture can be described as unwritten rules or personalities while school climate can be described as attitudes or expectations. For educators, it may be easier to change an attitude (climate) than a personality (culture) of a school (Gruenert, 2008). The culture of a school may be

determined by the personnel's attitude toward structures and supports which frame school climate. They have similar characteristics yet different concepts.

School Climate

School environments have different characteristics. Petrie (2014) and Low and Van Ryzin (2014) found that school climate is becoming more recognized as an important influence on bullying. School climate has two key features: disciplinary structure and student support. Members of the United States Department of Education (2013), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Institute for Educational Sciences, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, and several state departments of education have focused their attention recently on school climate reform (Thapa et al., 2012). The strategy was used to support improvement efforts by helping school administrators, students, and parents or guardians create more supportive and engaging K-12 schools nationwide. These researchers specified that school climate was indeed an important factor in reducing bullying. Since bullying is not an isolated event, advocates for children across the United States are concerned that school climates may be to blame.

School climate was compared among countries. After analyzing discipline structures and student supports, Yang et al. (2013) indicated that American and Chinese students have significant differences in their perceptions of school climate. Differences on cultural factors such as respect for authority, academic and social values, self- and peer-regulation of behaviors, and classroom management of teachers may impact school climate. Yang et al. stated that based on America's cultural values, students have no respect for teachers or administration, no concern about consequences for their actions,

no values for social or educational growth, and no discipline and guidance from teachers. Chinese students do not have the same cultural values as American students. In China, students are expected to respect educators, and there are strong consequences otherwise. These differences in cultures emphasize the importance in the type of school climate being cultivated to support diversity.

Types

There are several types of school climates: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Authoritarian school climates have high discipline structure with low student support. Sultan and Hussain (2012) found that authoritarian climates were associated negatively with student performance. Permissive school climates have low discipline structure with high student support. Authoritative school climates have high discipline structure and high student support. Gregory et al. (2011) and Voight (2013) claimed authoritative schools were referred to as positive school climates where students are supported yet structured with clear academic and behavioral expectations. Leaders of authoritative school climates have shared beliefs, values, and attitudes and the school climate is a product of positive social interactions between students and teachers (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008). The implication being that authoritative school leaders create an environment where students flourish in emotional, academic, and social development while authoritarian and permissive school climates hinder achievement.

Obeying the discipline structures set by school leaders becomes easier when students feel supported. School resource officers are used to promote authoritative school climates. To build relationships, the police officers bond with the students by reading stories, attending sporting events, and developing relationships with students. Kupchik

(2009) showed increasing numbers of police officers are being assigned to schools to enforce laws, to connect with students as positive role models, and to support the discipline structures of school climate. Kupchik also showed the importance of a structured and supported a climate in schools by allowing authority figures to set the discipline but also offer support. Resource offices have a positive effect on schools by supporting authoritative school climates.

Benefits

Teachers thrive in an authoritative school climate. O'Brennan and Bradshaw (2013) reported a positive school climate provided teachers and staff members of schools with benefits such as more collaboration, immense commitment, stronger student relationships, heightened job satisfaction, teacher retention, and feelings of support by the administration. In addition to the benefits, teachers also felt a great sense of safety within authoritative school climates (Berg & Cornell, 2015; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2012), which demonstrated the emphasis of an authoritative school climate. For students to be successful, teachers must have a sense of joy about their role in empowering students. In contrast, if a school's climate were nonauthoritative, either authoritarian or permissive, the teachers would likely be stressed or overwhelmed. An authoritative school climate may provide teachers a meaningful connection to the school which transfers positively to students.

School climates may influence the actions of students. Cornell and Huang (2016) observed that an authoritative school climate is used to create an atmosphere that is conducive to low-risk behaviors. Cornell and Huang found that students in authoritative school climates had lower levels of high-risk behaviors. These behaviors could involve

alcohol use, drug use, bullying, weapon-carrying at school, gang membership, and suicidal thoughts. Additionally, O'Brennan and Bradshaw (2013) recognized positive school climate as a vital element for school reform in efforts to reduce high-risk behaviors. Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, and Gottfredson (2005) found that when students perceived their school as having fair and clear rules, delinquent behaviors and peer victimizations decreased. Gottfredson et al. stated that an authoritative school climate has the potential to save students from risky behaviors that are harmful to their emotional, physical, and psychological development by offering disciplinary structure and student support that nurtures progress. Anderson (2015) and Willoughby, Good, Adachi, Hamza, and Tavernier (2014) admitted taking risk is a normal part of adolescence. An authoritative school climate gives students opportunities to take those risks within the discipline structures while still being supported by educators. An authoritative environment gives teachers time required to focus on the academic achievement of students instead of continuously managing discipline and emotional needs. School climates that lacked disciplinary structure and student support may influence the risk students choose to take.

School administrators who provided an authoritative school climate increased academic achievement. Cornell, Shukla, and Konold (2016) made the distinction that an authoritative school climate was associated with higher student engagement, achievement, and aspirations. Gregory and Cornell (2009) found that learning environments that were safe with firm, yet supportive and fair, frameworks were used to help support student engagement and achievement. Marx and Byrnes (2012) challenged the findings and stated that school climate was not helpful to the contentment and

academic success of diverse students. Marx and Byrnes suggested that although there was a strong association between school climate and academic success, more research needed to be performed in determining the influence of demographic factors like ethnicity.

Authoritative school climates have a decrease in bullying. Seeley, Tombari, Bennett, and Dunkle (2011) and Cornell, Shukla, and Konold (2015) found that safe learning environments provided by schools and staff created opportunities for students to lessen the negative effects of bullying. Petrie (2014) revealed an authoritative school climate impacted student behaviors by weakening bullying through encouraging the production of positive behaviors. With the focus on positive behaviors, students may have the confidence to lessen bullying and victimization further.

An authoritative school climate may also affect student engagement which could lead to higher attendance in school. Seeley et al. (2011) reported when bullied students were engaged in school, they attended school more often and achieved more, regardless of peer victimization. When students feel connected to the school, they want to stay engaged. An authoritative school climate impacts student engagement which impacts student attendance.

As products of environment, school climates were also linked to fostering respectful members of society. Laursen (2014) investigated positive school climates and their ability to provide developmental opportunities for youth to support their contributions to a democratic society as self-sufficient citizens. Laursen claimed that school climate had an impact on character traits of students, regardless of their home climates. Authoritative school climates can strengthen traits of citizenship.

Authoritative school climates maintain equality for all students. Gregory et al. (2011) revealed nonauthoritative school climates had the highest suspension rates for both Caucasian and African American students. According to guidelines from the officials at the United States Department of Education (2014), school administrators have a civil rights obligation to ensure equity and fairness to all students. Nonauthoritative school climates hinder student engagement, academic achievement, and emotional development; hence, they may fail to provide social freedom and equality to all students.

Bullying

The term *bullying* has a broad meaning. Bush (2009) attempted to clarify the research behind bullying. Bush stated that Olwesus, a Swedish researcher, was the first to publish a systematic study on peer harassment or bullying. Olwesus' research was released in 1973 in Sweden. Additionally, Bush noted that in 1978, Olwesus published an expanded version of his work which appeared in the United States under the title *Aggression in Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys*. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, curiosity about peer aggression within their borders spread worldwide among countries including Japan, England, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and the United States. Mongan (2013) mentioned attention on the topic increased intensively in the United States after the media coverage of the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999. The media coverage increased the public's perception of bullying and garnered researchers' consideration that bullying may indeed serve as a precursor to violent episodes. Mongan implied that although bullying was nothing new, perception had changed. Even today, bullying is a highly researched topic, yet solutions are still foreign.

A single incident is not considered bullying. Petrie (2014) and Bush (2009) defined bullying as aggressive, hurtful behaviors repeated over time toward victims who are less likely to defend themselves. Petrie (2014) and Bush (2009) explained that although adolescents occasionally say and do hurtful things to their peers, the type of aggression to be cautioned against occurs on a regular basis. Hurting someone's feelings is a natural part of social development for adolescents since they are exploring with words and actions. When a purposeful decision occurs to repeat hurtful behaviors, bullying and victimization begin.

A large number of adolescents have suffered from repeated aggression. Freiberg (2013) discovered that students who have trouble fitting in or who have special needs are more likely to be bullied. Taylor (2009) discovered that trend earlier when he cited that 55% of students surveyed who came from these two categories had been bullied. Of the victims, 87% stated their bullies were the same age or older than them while 75% stated their bullies were comparable in size or larger than them. Taylor claimed bullying was widespread and generally ignored, and showed that bullies preyed primarily on younger and smaller victims. Additionally, Taylor implied that bullies perceived their victims as weak; therefore, such behavior continually weakened the victim and empowered the bully. The mental anguish from repeated bullying may delay recovery efforts for the victims.

The after-effects of bullying are often harmful to the mental stability of victims. Donoghue, Almeida, Brandwein, Rocha, and Callahan (2014) stated that being a victim of bullying led to illness, psychological stress, and even maladjustments. Donoghue et al. suggested that victimization had serious long-term effects that damaged the development

of adolescents. Though bullies may never relive the repeated actions, the mental anguish of the victims was signified by their replaying the actions often in their mind.

Although bullying may involve one or two victims, the unwanted behavior may affect a whole school. Mehta, Cornell, Fan, and Gregory (2013) asserted there was a common belief that bullying influenced school climate which in turn affected victims and bystanders. Considering while adults usually strive to keep schools safe, bullying actions could destroy the sense of safety for the whole school community, including teachers, administrators, and even classified members like custodians and cafeteria staff. The severity of bullying and its influence on a productive learning environment could destroy all stakeholders of a school.

Types

There are several types of bullying. Bush (2009) claimed that verbal bullying consisted of threatening, teasing, or name-calling while physical bullying involved hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving, or pinching. Relational bullying included ignoring individuals, social isolation, intentional exclusion from friends, gossiping, and spreading rumors. The explanations were necessary to understand the wide range of bullying and its capacity to reach many students. Cyberbullying, another form of relational bullying, is a primary focus today due to advancements in technology adolescents interact with daily.

With an estimated four million adolescents using the Web daily, cyberbullying has become the newest way to inflict harm. Runk (2006) defined cyberbullying as willfully causing verbal, emotional, or psychological harm to another person by using cyber tools to send violent or threatening messages that trick, tease, humiliate, stalk, impersonate, intimidate, threaten, harass, generate rumors, or bully to a vast audience

instantly with long-lasting effects. With this definition, Runk explained that although the harm inflicted upon the victim was similar to traditional bullying, the increased audience and repetition of action of cyberbullying caused extreme emotional and psychological turmoil in the victims and the witnesses. Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, and Solomon (2010) discovered that 49.5% of students from a sample size of 2,186 in an urban school district admitted to online victimization, and 33.7% admitted to being the bully. Runk (2006) noted in his research that the impact of cyberbullying might be stronger than traditional face-to-face bullying. Many reasons exist for this belief; however, the most concerning was because the home was no longer a safe place for victims to escape. Mishna et al. (2010) found that online bullies felt funny, popular, and powerful; yet, many also said they felt guilty. Victims, on the other hand, felt sad, angry, and depressed. Runk (2006) revealed alarming facts about cyberbullying and the impact on adolescents that sacrifice themselves by choosing to be online. Educating students that their actions on technology can be traced may prevent some cyberbullying and keep our youth safe and away from harm.

Impact on Academic Success

Bullying and victimization affect academic success. Lacey and Cornell (2013) found the perception of bullying was predictive of how students performed on state-mandated assessments. Additionally, Lacey and Cornell (2014) found that school-wide assessments of bullying were correlated with academic achievement in students. When unwanted behaviors occur, neither the bullies nor the victims are learning. Lacey and Cornell implied for students to perform well on assessments, school administrators must

provide a safe learning environment for engagement. Not only do victims perform lower on state-mandated assessments, so do bullies.

Victims of bullying have an overall lower achievement level in schools. Wang et al. (2014) reported that victims have a lower grade point average than students who were not bullied. Wang et al. stated victims had a hard time concentrating on learning. To achieve in schools, students must feel safe and secure. Victims may be too overwhelmed to comprehend new material.

Victims lose interest in school altogether. Koonce and Mayo (2013) reported more than 160,000 students were absent from school every day based on bullying. Koonce and Mayo highlighted the level of fear and loneliness a victim feels when the possibility of facing a bully at school becomes too overwhelming. The feeling of isolation may consume victims until their enthusiasm for school is depleted.

Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying

Teasing and bullying damages and destroys the productivity of schools. Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, and Konold (2009) agreed that bullying creates a climate that fosters fear and intimidation in schools that make learning difficult for victims. If bullying continues to fester within a school, the climate becomes toxic. Schools without an authoritative school climate may not be successful.

The good news is that adolescents may outgrow the tendency to bully. Mahlerwein (2010) revealed that bullying does taper off by the time adolescents reach high school. Mahlerwein implied that middle schools were not only hard for victims to muddle through but also for bullies. Indeed, perseverance on both sides of the bullying and victimization coin is necessary and may be the key to overcoming these behaviors.

Educators and parents may assist adolescents by providing them with tools as they grow that encourages them to stand up to violence with confidence.

Prevalence in Gender

Males and females have been connected to bullying and victimization. Guerra, Williams, and Sadek (2011) pointed out that bullying was associated with low self-esteem and negative school climate among both male and female students. Guerra et al. found that all students were prone to bullying and victimization regardless of their gender. However, Carbone-Lopez et al. (2010) found that females were more likely to encounter indirect bullying such as teasing, and Taylor (2009) noted males tend to be more physical during bullying. Nickerson, Singleton, Schnurr, and Collen (2014) found that one way girls used hands-off bullying was through cyberbullying. Nickerson et al. summed up the discussion by highlighting the fact that both genders participated in and experienced bullying although the type of bullying differed.

Some bullies may be victims as well. Carbone-Lopez et al. (2010) found males were more likely to be both bullies and victims. Carbone-Lopez et al. implied either males experience victimization and then develop into bullies, or that bullies, in time, become victims. Regardless of which encounter happened first, boys were more likely to experience both bullying and victimization while girls were either bullies or victims.

Prevalence in Different Ethnicities

Ethnicity has a significant role in bullying and victimization. Booth et al. (2014) disclosed that Caucasian females and Hispanic and African American males displayed a strong ethnic identity that correlates positively with school climate. However, Booth et al. indicated differences among African American students when they found the students

utilized parental cultural socialization as a protective exercise while at school. Booth et al. suggested that African American and Hispanic students had a strong sense of pride in their ethnicity; however, African American students protected themselves from victimization differently based on cultural and historical backgrounds. When faced with obstacles, referring to personal or shared experiences may be a tool that is used to offer protection from unwanted behaviors.

An authoritative school climate benefits student engagement among all ethnicities. Konold, Cornell, Shukla, and Huang (2016) found that African Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians benefitted from increased student engagement and reduced victimization experiences with authoritative school climate perceptions. Konold et al. showed that all ethnic groups benefit from a positive school experience. No doubt, Benner and Graham (2013) stated that students who held a negative perception of school climate were more likely to face discriminatory actions by peers, school personnel, and societal institutions. Making sure all students have positive experiences and connections in school might increase engagement in all ethnicities.

Ethnicity may influence the dropout rates among bullies and victims. Peguero (2011) conducted a study that indicated a higher risk of dropping out of school from African American and Latino American students. Ngo and Davis (2014) discovered that African American adolescents have a higher involvement with gang activity based on low social bonding. One way adolescents bond by socializing is by committing crimes together (Smangs, 2010). If adolescents are forced to look for attachment somewhere other than their parents or teachers, they find it in peer groups; most often gangs. African

American and Latino American students may be at a higher risk for dropping out of school due to bullying behaviors that lead to criminal activities for attention.

Prevalence in School Location and Size

More students at a school do not necessarily mean more violence. Gentry (2008) and Gist (2012) found that the perception in both rural and urban schools was that urban schools experienced more bullying. However, the evidence found differently. No significant difference existed between rural and urban schools in the type or the level of violence. In addition, Gottfredson and Dipietro (2011) hypothesized that small schools would have lower rates of victimization based on a low student-teacher ratio. Again, Gottfredson and Dipietro were surprised to find that lower rates of victimization were found in larger schools. Gottfredson and Dipietro confronted a common assumption that small, rural schools would have less bullying. Students in low student-teacher ratio schools may not be protected from victimization.

Seeking Support Against Bullying

Most bullying actions go unreported. Millspaugh, Cornell, Huang, and Datta (2015) acknowledged prevention strategies were hard to implement when students were unwilling to report threats of violence or unwanted behavior. Millspaugh et al. recognized it was hard for school personnel, parents, peers, and others to help when they were not informed. Various factors may contribute to whether a victim or witness of bullying would inform others of unwanted behaviors.

Victims have a hard time sharing with adults and peers for many different reasons. DeLara (2012) investigated why students do not seek help with bullying. The results showed the following: shame, the ubiquitous nature of bullying, a sense of

helplessness, concerns about inappropriate actions adults will take, parental knowledge, self-reliance, and a different definition of bullying than adults used. DeLara outlined reasons victims cannot find a voice to seek help. Although victims gave an insight into their answers, lingering psychological and emotional struggles existed that ensured knowing the information about victims was simply not enough. Donoghue et al. (2014) found when students do not seek help, they use a maladaptive coping strategy which means they learned to dissociate from the emotions, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, avoid situations that may provoke certain behaviors, or escape through panic attacks and phobias. Various reasons exist for remaining silent; however, the effects of taking no action may cause long-term emotional damage.

Differences in gender prevail when it comes to a victim's willingness to seek help. Williams and Cornell (2006) and Bandyopadhyay et al. (2009) found that bullied males were less likely to seek help if they perceived the school climate as nonauthoritative. Nevertheless, Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, and Fan (2010) observed both male and female students who perceived their teachers and school climate as authoritative were more likely to seek help. Regardless of gender, school climate must be safe and positive toward eliminating bullying to enable the victims to stand up and seek help against bullying.

Seeking Help from Teachers

Many researchers have determined that bullied victims do not report to adults. Unnever and Cornell (2004) stated only 40% of 2,437 middle school students surveyed informed an adult of their victimization. Unnever and Cornell found students were not reporting bullying behaviors to parents, teachers, administrators, or any other adults. A

large percentage of students are being victimized by bullies and failing to seek help from their teachers.

Social status plays a significant role in unreported bullying behaviors. Yablon (2012) warned that social status goals played a role in seeking help with an association incurring negative psychological costs. Because of this situation, males were less likely to ask for help from teachers. Adolescents may be so concerned about their popularity that they do not share their fears with caring and loving teachers.

Ethnicity had a role in students asking for help and guidance from adults. Shirley and Cornell (2011) claimed African American students were less likely to seek help from bullying and threats of violence by peers than Caucasian students. Shirley and Cornell suggested that while all ethnic backgrounds find it difficult to report bullying, African Americans may struggle even more with reporting.

Seeking Help from Peers

Some research has found strong relationships may provide opportunities for seeking help from bullying. Yablon (2012) discovered that intimacy goals enhanced students' willingness to seek help from peers. Yablon suggested that when students felt connected with others who offer a sense of safety, they were more likely to reach out for assistance which was also true for witnesses of bullying behaviors.

Witnesses Who Help

An audience fuels most bullies. Cowie (2014) reported that bullies rely on the reinforcement they earn from the peers as they stand by and witness the bullying. Cowie considered that witnesses were caught in the middle of a social dilemma. The witnesses were aware of their own need for social acceptance and security (Cowie, 2014). In

addition, Cowie (2014) implied that students need encouragement and a sense of empowerment to stand against bullying. Cowie theorized if witnesses felt supported for their action of seeking help for victims, they would be more likely to react helpfully. Also, Cowie found that even though they suffered from emotional disturbance and were left feeling like victims themselves, as witnesses aged, they were less likely to take action against bullying. Ferrans and Selman (2014) documented when witnesses were audience members to the bullying, the prevalence of bullying increased; however, when the witnesses expressed criticism to the bullying, the prevalence decreased. When witnesses stand by and let bullying happen, the unwanted behavior appears more frequently (Ferrans & Selman, 2014). Bullying behaviors may be emphasized when witnesses standby instead of taking action.

A previous victim could be a strong witness to bullying. Chapin and Brayack (2016) wrote that adolescents who had experienced abuse themselves were more likely to intervene, regardless of the type of bullying they witnessed. In addition, Chapin and Brayack found that adolescents who were well-informed of community resources were more likely to assist victims. Chapin and Brayack revealed a hint of good news when it came to empowering victims to have a voice. If they cannot speak up for themselves, perhaps they can speak up for others.

Researchers have also studied a phenomenon called diffusion of responsibility. Siu, Shek, and Law (2012) believed that witnesses were less likely to assist a victim if there were people around, especially if they perceived the other witnesses as close friends of the victim. Witnesses may feel vulnerable when helping the other person; therefore, they wait for someone else to take the first step. Siu et al. indicated witnesses are more

likely to take action when they are the only witness who confirmed the fact that bullies prefer an audience. The more people around, the less likely someone would take action.

Prevention Strategies

Many strategies have been developed to assist school personnel in preventing bullying. Milsom and Gallo (2006) admitted most bullies lack social skills, so they use force and power to get what they want. O'Brien (2011) listed one of the most important steps for school administrators would be to define what bullying is and build awareness that using force and power toward others would not be tolerated in the school. Halstead (2015) pointed out one strategy would be to have a school-wide approach against bullying. Milsom and Gallo (2006) added that bus drivers, cafeteria staff, paraprofessionals, and custodians are all part of the school personnel who should be trained and made explicitly aware of the administrators' expectations concerning bullying. It takes a village to create school climates that facilitate respectful behaviors to build the social skills that some students lack. A school's approach to preventing bullying should include all personnel.

Research results have indicated many ways that teachers may begin improving school climates within their classrooms. Milsom and Gallo (2006) concluded teachers should hold weekly meetings in a safe environment to discuss issues openly. Using the opportunity for open discussions would also allow them, if necessary, to modify classroom rules. Additionally, teaching empathy to bullies was found to be an effective strategy in bullying prevention. O'Brien (2011) noted that teachers who greeted students at the door modeled effective communication by addressing students by name and listening before talking which made students feel more connected to the school. Finally,

Milsom and Gallo (2006) suggested that students who work in cooperative learning groups have an opportunity to interact with others and become aware of different viewpoints. Milsom and Gallow suggested that giving students an opportunity to participate in discussions helped to support their ownership of learning. When teachers demonstrate a level of respect toward their students, school climate may be improved.

The most important strategy an adult may display is positivity. Benner and Graham (2013) theorized that students with positive attitudes had positive experiences, and students with negative attitudes had negative experiences. Curwick (2012), Thapa et al. (2012), and Runk (2006) found when teachers modeled positive, respectful, and empathetic behaviors and attitudes, their students were more likely to behave appropriately as they learned problem-solving and social skills. Experts at the American Psychological Association (n.d.) reported when tolerance is standard in the classroom, students realized the promotion of respect and learned to appreciate differences among others. Students learn positive behaviors by emulating positive role models such as teachers.

To guide bullies in developing social skills, teachers must be willing to understand and support the bully. Sometimes bullies need individual attention. Williams (2014) supported the assertion that in reality, most of the attention was given to the victim, and the bully does not get the help he or she needs. Claxton, Costa, and Kallick (2016) noted teachers could ask bullies to use a journal to reflect on becoming more conscious of their actions. Providing opportunities for students who bully to reflect upon their actions could lead to thinking flexibly. Claxton et al. confirmed that the need to address the actions of the bullying behavior was just as important as consoling the victim.

Teachers could guide bullies toward transitions by being conscious of the support the bullies lack.

Conclusion

It is human nature to be social. Lauren (2014) stated that people are all born to be social beings who rely on interactions with society to survive and thrive. School leaders must be made aware of the natural social developments and create climates where students feel safe interacting with other adolescents who are also developing. Katz and Porath (2011) stated that children develop a sense of self in the early years of development which are based on their relationships with teachers and peers. Katz and Porath suggested finding ways to develop social and emotional learning communities where students are valued, nurtured, and supported in conjunction with academic achievement. LaRusso, Romer, and Selman (2008) found these types of learning communities lead to a greater sense of belonging and less depression. Also, students must be given opportunities for a confident future with experiences of success in which they can value diversity regardless of their cultural, linguistic, or learning background (Katz & Porath, 2011). Acceptance in social settings for all types of people and ethnicities is highly important. The alternative to an environment of love and acceptance would be hate and discrimination. Since humans are social beings, healthy and authoritative environments may be the key for adolescents to learn and grow.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Over the past 30 years, researchers and educators have increasingly accepted the significance of school climates when considering management of bullying behaviors. Only recently have researchers associated successful school climates with being authoritative in nature that involves both high disciplinary structure and high student support. Although some research addressed the connection between school climate and bullying perceptions, a lack of studies exists that analyze the influence a school climate and certain demographic factors have on seventh-grade students' perceptions of bullying. This research study responded to these identified gaps.

This study examined the influence of school climate and demographic factors to explain middle school students' perceptions of or experiences with bullying. The hypotheses are as follows:

1. The combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of perceptions of the prevalence of bullying among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).
2. The combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of perceptions of the

prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).

3. The combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of the self-reported aggressive attitudes among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).
4. The combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the self-reported bullying experiences among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location).

In this chapter, the research design, target population, sampling procedure, and the instrument used for data collection are described. This chapter also includes a summary of the limitations of this study.

Research Design

A quantitative, nonexperimental design was used for this study. This design was considered appropriate as it was impossible to control, manipulate, or alter the variables in the study given the challenges of experimental research in school settings. Despite the limitations associated with nonexperimental designs, these designs have been shown to be quite effective when the goal of empirical research is to develop models of explanation or prediction as opposed to exploring cause-effect relationships (Field, 2009).

Sample

In this study, a multistage sampling plan was used to select 320 seventh-grade students attending four public schools in the state of Arkansas. The target population for this study was seventh-graders in Arkansas public schools, but more broadly, middle schoolers in Arkansas public schools. At the first stage of selection, four school districts (two rural and two urban) were purposively chosen from districts in the state of Arkansas. A total of 1,243 questionnaires were electronically distributed to the administrators of students at four middle schools in these districts (one school in each district). Although a fair overall response rate (56 %) was recorded, this rate varied widely across schools. At School A (urban), of the 603 questionnaires sent, 296 responded (49%). At School B (urban), 380 were sent and 207 responded (54%). At School C (rural), however, 148 were sent, and 105 students responded (71%). Finally, at School D (rural), of the 100 questionnaires distributed, 80 students responded (80%). At the second stage of selection, responses from the smallest sample (School D, $n = 80$) were used as a baseline for randomly selecting samples (stratified by gender and ethnicity) from each of the other schools (School A, $n = 84$; School B, $n = 84$; School C, $n = 72$) for an average of 80 cases from each of the schools. The demographic characteristics of students at the four schools are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics by School

	Urban School		Rural School	
Demographic	A	B	C	D
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	28%	28%	69%	50%
Non-Caucasian	72%	72%	31%	50%
Hispanic/Latino	12%	49%	12%	19%
Asian	2%	2%	1%	9%
American Indian/Alaskan	1%	1%	8%	13%
Black/African American	46%	2%	1%	4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%	12%	5%	0%
Two or more races	10%	6%	4%	5%
Gender				
Male	47%	45%	44%	56%
Female	53%	55%	56%	44%

Instrumentation

The instrument used in the study was the Authoritative School Climate Survey (ASCS) developed by Cornell (2011). The original version of this instrument, named the School Climate Bullying Survey (Cornell & Sheras, 2003), primarily measured school climate. According to the authors' analysis of data from several studies where the instrument was employed, results revealed a trend of positive correlations between disciplinary structures and student support. By this evidence, they developed the

Authoritative School Climate Theory, which identifies schools where students report high scores on these two dimensions as having an authoritative climate. The ASCS was developed as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of the impact of these school climate variables on student outcomes (Cornell, 2011).

The ASCS comprises 11 separate scales: student engagement, school disciplinary structure, student support (respect for students), student support (willingness to seek help), and academic expectations. Other scales included prevalence of teasing and bullying, prevalence of teasing and bullying by teachers/staff, dating violence index, sexual harassment index, aggressive attitudes, victim experiences, and bullying experiences. A score for each scale is obtained by adding the ranks in a series of 4-point Likert-scaled items ([1] Strongly disagree, [2] Disagree, [3] Agree, and [4] Strongly agree). Additionally, the instrument contains a section each for peer nominations and optional comments.

Because the scales of the ASCS work independently, the use of all scales is not required to maintain reliability and validity of the instrument. For the current study, the following six scales were selected: school disciplinary structure (seven items), student support [respect for students and willingness to seek help] (eight items), prevalence of teasing and bullying (five items), prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff (four items), aggressive attitudes (six items), and bullying experiences (five items). Scores for bullying experiences, unlike the other scales, were ranked on a scale ([1] never, [2] once or twice, [3] about one per week, and [4] more than once per week). This instrument had two validity screening items, #37 and #88. Based on answers given for these two questions, 27 cases were excluded. According to Cornell (2011), constructs on the ASCS have

relatively high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficients for disciplinary structure = .77, student support and bullying experiences = .85, and prevalence of bullying and aggressive attitudes = .79.

In addition to information obtained for the various scales, demographic information regarding educational aspirations, parent educational attainment, and number of parents in the home was also obtained using the ASCS. Respondents' characteristics on these additional demographic variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Additional Demographic Characteristics by School and Gender

	School A (*n* = 84)		School B (*n* = 84)		School C (*n* = 73)		School D (*n* = 80)	
	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)
Educational Exp.								
Might not grad. HS	1 (17)	0 (00)	1 (17)	0 (00)	1 (17)	1 (17)	1 (17)	1 (17)
Might grad. HS	0 (00)	0 (00)	2 (20)	1 (10)	1 (10)	0 (00)	2 (20)	4 (40)
Exp. to grad. HS	8 (17)	4 (09)	7 (15)	3 (06)	5 (11)	4 (09)	11 (23)	5 (11)
Exp. to grad. 2-yr. coll.	4 (11)	3 (09)	9 (26)	4 (11)	4 (11)	3 (09)	4 (11)	4 (11)
Exp. to grad. 4-yr. coll.	23 (22)	6 (06)	10 (10)	10 (10)	15 (15)	16 (16)	14 (14)	9 (09)
Exp. post-grad student	13 (11)	22 (18)	20 (17)	17 (14)	10 (08)	12 (10)	13 (11)	12 (10)
Parent's Education								
Did not grad. HS	2 (05)	1 (02)	13 (30)	9 (20)	5 (11)	5 (11)	3 (07)	6 (14)
Graduated HS	9 (10)	6 (07)	13 (15)	10 (12)	8 (09)	11 (13)	19 (19)	10 (12)
Graduated 2-year coll.	11 (20)	3 (05)	9 (16)	7 (13)	5 (09)	7 (13)	9 (16)	5 (09)
Graduated 4-year coll.	13 (17)	15 (19)	9 (12)	9 (12)	5 (06)	8 (10)	9 (12)	10 (13)
Completed post-grad	14 (25)	10 (18)	5 (09)	0 (00)	13 (23)	5 (09)	5 (09)	4 (07)
Parents at Home								
No parent	2 (29)	1 (14)	1 (14)	0 (00)	2 (29)	0 (00)	1 (14)	0 (00)
One parent	19 (20)	12 (13)	11 (12)	6 (06)	5 (05)	11 (12)	19 (20)	12 (13)
Two parents	15 (07)	22 (11)	37 (18)	29 (14)	29 (14)	25 (12)	25 (12)	23 (11)

The version of the ASCS used in this study was developed for secondary school level students in Grades 6-12 (Cornell, 2011). Given that the target population for this study was seventh-grade students, four scales/sections (dating violence index, sexual harassment index, peer nominations, and optional comments) on the instrument were deemed either inappropriate for seventh-grade students or irrelevant to the current study. For this reason, these four scales were omitted from the survey that was ultimately administered to respondents.

Data Collection Procedures

Following Institutional Review Board approval on April 18, 2017 (see Appendix), the researcher contacted administrators at each of the schools to schedule delivery of the ASCS. Each superintendent provided a letter of consent for responses from their students to be used in the study. Once permission was obtained from the superintendents, a link to an electronic copy of the ASCS was forwarded to provide students access to the questionnaire. Administrators at all the districts chose to use a 45-minute advisory period to administer the 20-minute survey; therefore, instructional time was not lost. Furthermore, due to spring testing, all districts administered the assessment during the month of May of 2017.

Introductory statements on the questionnaire informed each respondent about the purpose of the study and that their participation was voluntary. Furthermore, respondents were reminded that their responses were anonymous, and they were free to disregard the survey without penalty. It is worth noting that some students elected not to complete the questionnaire (as reflected in the response rate), and other issues such as absenteeism and technological difficulties also affected response rates. In all, data collection lasted for

about two weeks. Once all the questionnaires were completed, the data were downloaded and stored on a laptop computer that was password protected. In preparation for analysis, the data were organized using Microsoft Excel.

Analytical Methods

To address each of the four hypotheses in this study, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. For each analysis, the school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support), as well as demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location), were entered as predictor variables. The demographic variables were entered in the first block, and the school climate variables were entered in the second block.

Hierarchical multiple regression was deemed the most appropriate test of significance because this technique permits the development and testing of explanatory models for predictor variables that are regressed on continuous level outcome variables. Furthermore, this technique allows researchers to separate and examine the unique contribution to the overall model of variables in each of the blocks (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2015). In this study, the outcome variables for the hierarchical multiple regression were the ASCS scales for the prevalence of bullying, the prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, self-reported aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences. To determine statistical significance, the researcher used an overall significance level of .05 with a *Bonferroni* adjusted significance level of .01.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to this study that are worth noting. The first set of limitations is in regards to the primary instrument used in this study and therefore

potentially threaten construct validity. Although specific definitions of a bully and school climate were provided as part of the survey, definitions of bullying behavior differ by state, district, and even buildings within districts. Differences among these varied definitions present a potential threat to construct validity and therefore constitute a limitation. It is possible that respondents in this study may be influenced by those local definitions or interpretations of these constructs while completing the survey. Furthermore, respondents could also be influenced by their individual opinions based on experiences with parents, schools, and friends, or stories they have heard about bullying. Given that the instrument in this study relies on self-report, it was impossible to verify the accuracy of responses independently. This creates an opportunity for bias from selective memory, exaggeration, and telescoping. Selective memory is choosing to remember or not remember events that have occurred. Exaggeration is embellishing events that have happened in an attempt to make them appear more significant. Telescoping is recalling events that happened one time as if they happened multiple times (Taylor, Stein, Mumford, & Woods, 2014). It is possible that these situations may have influenced the data collected in ways that are unaccounted for in this study.

Another set of limitations to this study involve the techniques used for sample selection and the size of the sample selected. The total number of seventh-graders at the urban school districts chosen for this study was relatively large. However, this was not the case in the two rural districts. Furthermore, although it was desirable to obtain a much larger, stratified random sample for this study (which would involve drawing samples from additional districts), the cost and logistics of managing such data collection proved

to be prohibitive. Consequently, these sample selection choices pose a threat to the external validity of this study in a way that may limit the generalizability of the findings.

A final limitation of this study is related to the research design that was used. Although this is not necessarily a limitation, it is an acknowledgment of the limits of the knowledge claims made in this study. The intent of this study was to provide an explanatory model for perceptions about bullying under certain school climate and demographic conditions. This study was not designed to draw cause-effect conclusions about the relationship between school climate, demographic conditions, and perceptions about the bully. In this study, the researcher was not able to control, manipulate, or alter predictor variables, or employ any experimental techniques as would be required to make causal-effect knowledge claims.

Furthermore, although the data analysis processes used in this study are often employed to develop predictive models (Field, 2009), this study focused primarily on developing a model of explanation. Therefore, the data analysis section of this study does not include processes designed to validate the model for prediction. The researcher chose to limit model development in this study to the explanation to gain a foundational understanding of seventh-grade students' perceptions of bullying. A model of prediction would extend this study by anticipating or forecasting future events and trends.

Limitations are part of every research endeavor. The limitations described in this section will hopefully either provide readers of this report some basis for determining the extent to which the findings can be generalized or be used to draw conclusions regarding the nature of the relationship between the variables examined in this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

A quantitative method was used to examine the influence of school climate on the perception of bullying after controlling for demographic factors, such as school location, gender, and ethnicity. Seventh-grade students from two rural schools and two urban schools in Arkansas were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the prevalence of bullying, prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, self-reported aggressive attitudes, and self-reported bullying experiences. Two dimensions of school climate were used as predictor variables: discipline structure and student support. School location, gender, and ethnicity were demographic factors used as predictor variables. The four scales used as outcome variables were scales of the ASCS: prevalence of bullying, prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences. Table 3 displays the mean and standard deviation values for each of the outcome variables by categories of the predictor values.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

		Prevalence of Bullying		Bullying by Teachers/Staff		Aggressive Attitudes		Bullying Experiences	
School Location	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Urban	168	13.98	3.80	9.02	3.37	12.36	3.37	7.89	3.65
Rural	152	12.84	3.08	8.25	2.96	11.72	3.31	7.65	3.09
Gender									
Male	179	13.06	3.71	8.50	3.22	12.64	3.38	7.66	3.55
Female	141	13.92	3.21	8.84	3.18	11.32	3.18	7.92	3.18
Ethnicity									
Caucasian	164	13.71	3.39	8.75	3.18	11.82	3.14	8.09	3.39
Non-Caucasian	156	13.15	3.64	8.55	3.22	12.31	3.56	7.45	3.37
School Climate									
Authoritative	257	12.99	3.39	8.01	2.91	11.68	3.16	7.32	3.07
Nonauthoritative	63	15.27	3.45	11.27	3.00	12.67	3.69	9.64	4.00

Hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to investigate each of the four hypotheses. When testing multiple hypotheses, the chance of incorrectly rejecting a null hypothesis increases. Therefore, a Bonferroni adjustment was made, which corrected the significance level to .01 instead of .05. The findings for the four hypotheses are presented in this chapter.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated that the combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of perceptions of the

prevalence of bullying among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location). To test this hypothesis, a hierarchical linear regression model was developed. Before conducting regression, the assumptions of linearity, normally distributed errors, and homoscedasticity were checked using a residual plot. Examination of the residual plot indicated that none of these assumptions were markedly violated. Because the assumptions for hierarchical multiple regression were met, an initial model was developed regressing the predictors on the outcome variable. Although this initial model was statistically significant, $F(2, 314) = 17.56$, $p < .001$, a post hoc diagnosis of the model revealed some threats to model fit. For instance, an examination of Tolerance values revealed a potential problem with multicollinearity in Step 2 of the model. Two of the predictor variables, Discipline Structure and Student Support, were found to be highly correlated with Tolerance values exceeding a critical cut off [$< 1 - R^2$]. To address this, a composite variable, School Climate (Discipline Structure + Student Support), was created and substituted in the model (Leech et al., 2015). Furthermore, as part of model diagnosis, Cook's Distances were examined to identify cases that may have an undue influence on model. No influential cases (Cooks Distance ≥ 1) were identified (Leech et al., 2015). The correlation values of all variables in the revised model are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Correlation Coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Prevalence of Bullying	1.000	.163*	.122*	.081	-.329**
2. School Location		1.000	-.051	-.051	-.138*
3. Gender			1.000	.097*	.002
4. Ethnicity				1.000	.009
5. School Climate					1.000

Note. $n = 320$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

Step 1 of the revised model (only demographic variables) yielded a result that significantly predicted perceptions of the prevalence of bullying, $F(3, 316) = 5.50$, $p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .04$. However, as indicated by the value of R^2, only 4% of the variance in the perceptions of the prevalence of bullying could be predicted from students' demographic characteristics. When the school climate variables were included in Step 2 of the model, prediction was improved, R^2 change = .10, $F(1, 315) = 35.09$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. A summary of the regression model is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Model Predicting Perceptions of the Prevalence of Bullying

Model 1	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Regression	195.89	3	65.30	5.50	.001
Residual	3754.86	316	11.88		
Total	3950.75	319			
Model 2					
Regression	572.23	4	143.06	13.34	.000
Residual	3378.52	315	10.73		
Total	3950.75	319			

These findings indicate that school climate variables significantly contributed to the prediction of the prevalence of bullying, after controlling for student demographic characteristics, $F(4, 315) = 13.34$, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .13$. This is a medium effect size according to Cohen (1988).

An examination of the beta weights of the individual predictors (See Table 6) indicates that school climate (β = -.31) and school location (β = .13) had the highest beta and contributed significantly to predicting the prevalence of bullying. Gender also contributed significantly to predicting the prevalence of bullying. The beta weight for gender (β = .12) indicated that females were more likely to perceive the prevalence of bullying than males. The beta weight for school location (β = .13) indicated that students in urban locations were more likely to perceive the prevalence of bullying than students in rural locations. Students' ethnicity (β = .08) did not significantly predict their perceptions of bullying, implying that students' ethnicity did not influence their

perceptions of teasing and bullying in a significant way. School climate, on the other hand, showed a negative relationship with the outcome (β = -.31), indicating that students who perceived an authoritative school climate had lower perceptions of the prevalence of bullying at their schools.

Table 6

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Prevalence of Bullying from School Climate When Controlling for Demographic Factors (*N = *320)*

Variable	*B*	SEB	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Model 1				.05	.05
School location	1.22	.39	.17*		
Gender	.88	.39	.12*		
Ethnicity	.54	.39	.08		
Constant	10.04	.87			
Model 2				.15	.10
School location	.92	.37	.13*		
Gender	.86	.37	.12*		
Ethnicity	.55	.37	.08		
School Climate	-.17	.03	-.31**		
Constant	17.77	1.55			

*$p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

In conclusion, when perceptions of teasing and bullying were regressed on demographic and school climate predictors, the model showed a clear relationship between the predictor and outcome variables. Specifically, school climate was statistically significant and the most important predictor of the outcome compared to the students' demographic characteristics. This relationship was such that perception of an authoritative school climate was inversely related with perceptions of teasing and bullying among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools. Furthermore, of the student demographic variables, school location and gender were statistically significant and important predictors in the model, and ethnicity was neither statistically significant nor important.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated that the combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of perceptions of the prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location). To test this hypothesis, a hierarchical linear regression model was developed. Before conducting regression, the assumptions of linearity, normally distributed errors, and homoscedasticity were checked using a residual plot. Examination of the residual plot indicated that none of these assumptions were markedly violated. Because the assumptions for hierarchical multiple regression were met, an initial model was developed regressing the predictors on the outcome variable. Although this initial model was statistically significant, $F(2, 314) = 55.49$, $p < .001$, a post hoc diagnosis of the model revealed some threats to model fit. For instance, an examination of Tolerance

values revealed a potential problem with multicollinearity in Step 2 of the model. Two of the predictor variables, Discipline Structure and Student Support, were found to be highly correlated with Tolerance values exceeding a critical cut off [<1- R^2]. To address this, a composite variable, School Climate (Discipline Structure + Student Support), was created and substituted in the model (Leech et al., 2015). Furthermore, as part of model diagnosis, Cook's Distances were examined to identify cases that may have an undue influence on model. No influential cases (Cooks Distance ≥ 1) were identified (Leech et al., 2015). The correlation values of all variables in the revised model are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Correlation Coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Prevalence of Bullying by Teachers/Staff	1.000	.120*	.053	.031	-.518**
2. School Location		1.000	-.051	-.051	-.138*
3. Gender			1.000	.097*	.002
4. Ethnicity				1.000	.009
5. School Climate					1.000

Note. N = 320.
*p < .05. **p < .001.

Step 1 of the revised model (only demographic variables) yielded a result that did not significantly predict perceptions of the prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, $F(3, 316) = 2.03$, $p = 0.11$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$. However, as indicated by the value of R^2, only

1% of the variance in the perception of the prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff could be predicted from students' demographic characteristics. When the school climate variables were included in Step 2 of the model, prediction was improved, R^2 change = .26, $F(1, 315) = 111.04$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. A summary of the regression model is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Model Predicting Perceptions of the Prevalence of Bullying by Teachers/Staff

Model 1	*SS*	*Df*	*MS*	*F*	*P*
Regression	61.80	3	20.60	2.03	.109
Residual	3200.70	316	10.13		
Total	3262.50	319			
Model 2					
Regression	896.01	4	224.00	29.82	.000
Residual	2366.49	315	7.51		
Total	3262.50	319			

These findings indicate that school climate variables significantly contributed to the prediction of the prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, after controlling for student demographic characteristics, $F(4, 315) = 29.82$, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .27$. This is a larger than typical effect size according to Cohen (1988).

An examination of the beta weights of the individual predictors (See Table 9) indicates that school climate ($\beta = -.51$) had the highest beta and contributed significantly

to predicting the prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff. School location (β = .05), students' gender (β = .05) and students' ethnicity (β = .03) did not significantly predict their perceptions of bullying by teachers/staff, implying these demographic factors did not influence their perceptions of bullying by teachers/staff in a significant way. School climate, on the other hand, showed a negative relationship with the outcome (β = - .51), indicating that students who perceived an authoritative school climate had lower perceptions of the prevalence of bullying by their teachers/staff at their schools.

Table 9

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Prevalence of Bullying by Teachers/Staff from School Climate When Controlling for Demographic Factors (*N *= 320)*

Variable	*B*	SEB	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Model 1				.02	.02
School location	.80	.36	.13*		
Gender	.36	.36	.06		
Ethnicity	.21	.36	.03		
Constant	6.81	.81			
Model 2				.28	.26
School location	.34	.31	.05		
Gender	.34	.31	.05		
Ethnicity	.21	.31	.03		
School Climate	-.26	.02	-.51**		
Constant	18.33	1.29			

*$p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

In conclusion, when perceptions of bullying by teachers/staff was regressed on demographic and school climate predictors, the model showed a clear relationship between the predictor and outcome variables. Specifically, school climate was statistically significant and the most important predictor of the outcome compared to the students' demographic characteristics. This relationship was such that perception of an authoritative school climate was inversely related with perceptions of bullying by teachers/staff among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools. Demographic factors such as school location, gender, and ethnicity were neither statistically significant nor important.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated that the combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of self-reported aggressive attitudes of seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location). To test this hypothesis, a hierarchical linear regression model was developed. Before conducting regression, the assumptions of linearity, normally distributed errors, and homoscedasticity were checked using a residual plot. Examination of the residual plot indicated that none of these assumptions were markedly violated. Because the assumptions for hierarchical multiple regression were met, an initial model was developed regressing the predictors on the outcome variable. Although this initial model was statistically significant, $F(2, 314) = 34.23$, $p < .001$, a post hoc diagnosis of the model revealed some threats to model fit. For instance, an examination of Tolerance values revealed a potential problem with multicollinearity in Step 2 of the model. Two of

the predictor variables, Discipline Structure and Student Support, were found to be highly correlated with Tolerance values exceeding a critical cut off [< 1 - R^2]. To address this, a composite variable, School Climate (Discipline Structure + Student Support), was created and substituted in the model (Leech et al., 2015). Furthermore, as part of model diagnosis, Cook's Distances were examined to identify cases that may have an undue influence on model. No influential cases (Cooks Distance ≥ 1) were identified (Leech et al., 2015). The correlation values of all variables in the revised model are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Correlation Coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Aggressive Attitudes	1.000	.096*	-.195**	-.073	-.410**
2. School Location		1.000	-.051	-.051	-.138*
3. Gender			1.000	.097*	.002
4. Ethnicity				1.000	.009
5. School Climate					1.000

Note. n = 320.
*p < .05. **p < .001.

Step 1 of the revised model (only demographic variables) yielded a result that significantly predicted aggressive attitudes, $F(3, 316) = 5.33$, $p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .04$. However, as indicated by the value of R^2, only 4% of the variance in aggressive attitudes

could be predicted from students' demographic characteristics. When the school climate variables were included in Step 2 of the model, prediction was improved, R^2 change = .16, $F(1, 315) = 64.10$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. A summary of the regression model is presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Model Predicting Perceptions of the Aggressive Attitudes

Model 1	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Regression	172.96	3	57.66	5.33	.001
Residual	3418.02	316	10.82		
Total	3590.99	319			
Model 2					
Regression	750.91	4	187.73	20.82	.000
Residual	2840.08	315	9.02		
Total	3590.99	319			

These findings indicate that school climate variables significantly contributed to the prediction of self-reported aggressive attitudes, after controlling for student demographic characteristics, $F(4, 315) = 20.82$, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .20$. This is a medium effect size according to Cohen (1988).

An examination of the beta weights of the individual predictors (See Table 12) indicates that school climate ($\beta = -.41$) and gender ($\beta = -.19$) had the highest beta and contributed significantly to predicting of self-reported aggressive attitudes. School

location (β = .03) and students' ethnicity (β = -.05) did not significantly predict self-reported aggressive attitudes, implying that neither school location nor students' ethnicity influenced self-reported aggressive attitudes in a significant way. School climate on the other hand showed a negative relationship with the outcome (β = -.31), indicating that students who perceived an authoritative school climate had lower perceptions of the prevalence of bullying at their schools. Gender also showed a negative relationship with the outcome (β = -.19), indicating that female students were more likely to have lower perceptions of self-reported aggressive attitudes.

Table 12

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Aggressive Attitudes from School Climate When Controlling for Demographic Factors (*N = *320)*

Variable	*B*	SEB	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Model 1				.05	.05
School location	.57	.37	.08		
Gender	-1.26	.37	-.19**		
Ethnicity	-.34	.37	-.05		
Constant	13.18	.83			
Model 2				.21	.16
School location	.19	.34	.03		
Gender	-1.27	.34	-.19**		
Ethnicity	-.33	.34	-.05		
School Climate	-.21	.03	-.41**		
Constant	22.76	1.42			

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

In conclusion, when predictions of self-reported aggressive attitudes were regressed on demographic and school climate predictors, the model showed a clear relationship between the predictor and outcome variables. Specifically, school climate and gender were statistically significant and the most important predictors of the outcome compared to the students' demographic characteristics. This relationship was such that perception of an authoritative school climate and gender was inversely related with self-

reported aggressive attitudes among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools. Furthermore, school climate and gender were statistically significant and important predictors in the model, and school location and ethnicity were neither statistically significant nor important.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 stated that the combination of school climate variables (disciplinary structure and student support) will not contribute to the prediction of self-reported bullying experiences among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools after controlling for demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school location). To test this hypothesis, a hierarchical linear regression model was developed. Before conducting regression, the assumptions of linearity, normally distributed errors, and homoscedasticity were checked using a residual plot. Examination of the residual plot indicated that none of these assumptions were markedly violated. Because the assumptions for hierarchical multiple regression were met, an initial model was developed regressing the predictors on the outcome variable. Although this initial model was statistically significant, $F(2, 314) = 15.13$, $p < .001$, a post hoc diagnosis of the model revealed some threats to model fit. For instance, an examination of Tolerance values revealed a potential problem with multicollinearity in Step 2 of the model. Two of the predictor variables, Discipline Structure and Student Support, were found to be highly correlated with Tolerance values exceeding a critical cut off [$<1 - R^2$]. To address this, a composite variable, School Climate (Discipline Structure + Student Support), was created and substituted in the model (Leech et al., 2015). Furthermore, as part of model diagnosis, Cook's Distances were examined to identify cases that may have an undue

influence on model. No influential cases (Cooks Distance ≥ 1) were identified (Leech et al., 2015). The correlation values of all variables in the revised model are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Correlation Coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Bullying Experiences	1.000	.037	.039	.094*	-.296**
2. School Location		1.000	-.051	-.051	-.138*
3. Gender			1.000	.097*	.002
4. Ethnicity				1.000	.009
5. School Climate					1.000

Note. n = 320.
*p < .05. **p < .001.

Step 1 of the revised model (only demographic variables) yielded a result that did not significantly predicted perceptions of self-reported bullying experiences, $F(3, 316) = 1.23$, $p = .30$, adjusted $R^2 = .002$. However, as indicated by the value of R^2, less than 1% of the variance in the self-reported bullying experiences could be predicted from students' demographic characteristics. When the school climate variables were included in Step 2 of the model, prediction was improved, R^2 change = .09, $F(1, 315) = 30.23$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. A summary of the regression model is presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Model Predicting Perceptions of Self-Reported Bullying Experiences

Model 1	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Regression	42.35	3	14.12	1.23	.299
Residual	3627.46	316	11.48		
Total	3669.80	319			
Model 2					
Regression	360.01	4	90.00	8.57	.000
Residual	3309.79	315	10.51		
Total	3669.80	319			

These findings indicate that school climate variables significantly contributed to the prediction of self-reported bullying experiences, after controlling for student demographic characteristics, $F(4, 315) = 8.57$, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .09$. This is a small effect size according to Cohen (1988).

An examination of the beta weights of the individual predictors (See Table 15) indicates that school climate ($\beta = -.30$) had the highest beta and contributed significantly to predicting self-reported bullying experiences. Demographic factors such as school location ($\beta = .002$), gender ($\beta = .03$), and students' ethnicity ($\beta = .08$) did not significantly predict self-reported bullying experiences. No demographic factors were found to be significant in predicting self-reported bullying experiences, implying that school location, gender, or ethnicity do not influence bullying experiences in a significant way. School climate on the other hand showed a negative relationship with the outcome

(β = -.30), indicating that students who perceived an authoritative school climate had lower perceptions of self-reported bullying experiences at their schools.

Table 15

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Bullying Experiences from School Climate When Controlling for Demographic Factors (*N = *320)*

Variable	*B*	SEB	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Model 1				.002	.012
School location	.29	.38	.04		
Gender	.22	.38	.03		
Ethnicity	.63	.38	.09		
Constant	6.70	.86			
Model 2				.098	.087
School location	.01	.37	.002		
Gender	.21	.37	.03		
Ethnicity	.64	.37	.10		
School Climate	-.16	.03	-.30**		
Constant	13.80	1.53			

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

In conclusion, when self-reported bullying experiences were regressed on demographic and school climate predictors, the model showed a clear relationship between the predictor and outcome variables. Specifically, school climate was

statistically significant and the most important predictor of the outcome compared to the students' demographic characteristics. This relationship was such that perception of an authoritative school climate was inversely related with bullying experiences among seventh-grade students in Arkansas public schools. School location, gender, and ethnicity were neither statistically significant nor important.

Summary of Results

The results of the hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses indicate that when controlling for demographic variables, seventh-grade students' perceptions regarding school climate is an important predictor of perceptions regarding the prevalence of bullying, prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, self-reported aggressive behaviors, and self-reported bullying experiences compared to the influence of student demographic characteristics, as evidenced in Table 16.

Table 16

Summary of Results

	Bullying Related Outcomes			
Predictors	Prevalence	By Teachers	Aggressive Attitudes	Experiences
Authoritative School Climate	Negative**	Negative**	Negative**	Negative**
School Location	Positive* (Urban)	—	—	—
Gender	Positive* (F)	—	Negative** (M)	—
Ethnicity	—	—	—	—

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

Additionally, when perceptions regarding school climate were accounted for, the demographic variables of school location and gender significantly predicted prevalence of bullying among seventh-grade students. Students of urban schools were more likely to perceive the prevalence of bullying at their schools compared to students in rural schools. Likewise, female students were more likely to perceive the prevalence of bullying than male students. Ethnicity, on the other hand, had no influence on the perception of the prevalence of bullying. The only predictor variable that influenced the perceptions of prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff among seventh-grade students was school climate. School location, gender, and ethnicity had no influence on the perception of prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff. Gender and school climate were the predictor variables that influenced self-reported aggressive attitudes. School location and ethnicity had no influence on the outcome. This was the only outcome that gender had a negative relationship, which indicated that female students had lower perceptions of aggressive attitudes than male students. The only predictor variable that influenced self-reported bullying experiences was school climate. School location, gender, and ethnicity had no influence on bullying experiences. Overall, school climate had a negative relationship with all outcome variables, indicating that students who perceived an authoritative school climate had lower perceptions of the prevalence of bullying, prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Many factors impact the perception of bullying behaviors (Kim, 2006; Jones, 2013). Wiatrowski et al. (1981) claimed humans are born with a free will that must be controlled by conforming to society with rules and consequences. Cornell (2015) found that experiences children have and the environment to which they belong may foster bullying behaviors. Therefore, providing authoritative school climates with discipline structures and student supports theoretically increases overall success. The latest examination of bullying contributed to the discussion that an authoritative school climate influences seventh-grade students' perceptions more so than demographic factors. These findings further that conversation.

Findings and Conclusions

The primary aim of this study was to determine the extent to which school climate variables explained Grade 7 students' perceptions about bully-related outcomes at their school while at the same time attempting to account for the variance in these perceptions that may be attributable to students' demographic characteristics. Anchored in social-control theories and the authoritative school climate theories, emphasis in the characterization of school climate in this study was given to two aspects of school climate: discipline structure and student support. Preliminary data analysis confirmed the strong correlation between these two dimensions of school climate, and as a result, these

were treated as a single construct throughout data analysis. Furthermore, in line with the relevant literature, demographic characteristics in this study were limited to school location, gender, and ethnicity in line with the relevant literature.

Overall, students' demographic characteristics provided only limited insights for understanding the phenomenon of bullying as perceived by Arkansas students in the seventh grade. However, when school climate variables were included in each of the explanatory models for prevalence of bullying (Hypothesis 1), bullying by teachers and staff (Hypothesis 2), aggressive attitudes (Hypothesis 3), and bullying experiences (Hypothesis 4), the explanation of the bullying-related outcomes above and beyond any of the demographic characteristics was greatly improved. Furthermore, not only were the models including school climate variables statistically significant, but the magnitude of variance explained in each of the models confirm these models of explanation were potentially of practical importance.

School Climate

The findings indicated school climate is an extremely important component in explaining the perception about bullying among seventh-grade students. In this study, this importance is conveyed across all four bullying-related outcomes investigated. This connection is such that students who perceived their school climate as non-authoritative (as opposed to authoritative) were also more likely to perceive higher levels of bullying, therefore, concluding that perceptions of an authoritative school climate is an important negative predictor of perceptions of the general prevalence of bullying, bullying by teachers and staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences among Grade 7 students in this study. The findings in this study are similar to those by Gottfredson et al. (2005)

who noted that when students perceive their school environment as authoritative, delinquent behaviors and peer victimization actually decrease. Deviations from this pattern worth noting exist in this study. Lau (1996), for instance, stated that in some cultures, such as Chinese, students might be just as successful in authoritarian school climates because their home environment would be similar. Likewise, Miezitis (1971) stated that permissive school climates, such as Montessori schools, are more productive in positive child development. Whatever the case may be, the findings in this study provide additional evidence of the importance of school climate when trying to understand students' social or behavioral outcomes.

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of students, however, proved to be of little, or very limited, significance for explaining students' perceptions of bullying across all four outcomes. Furthermore, although each of the models that included only demographic characteristics was statistically significant, the effect sizes were generally too small to be of practical significance. This is especially true when considering the larger effect sizes observed when school climate variables were added to these models. The apparent influence of the demographic factors was considerably diminished.

School location. The influence of school location (urban versus rural), for instance, appeared to be of only marginal importance for explaining middle school students' perceptions across the bullying outcomes. The strongest indicator was in regards to opinions about overall prevalence of bullying. The findings here suggested that students at urban schools tended to perceive higher levels of overall bullying at their schools. School location, however, was not an important predictor of middle school

students' perceptions about bullying by teachers and staff, aggressive attitudes, or bullying experiences.

In regards to school location, a common theme throughout the literature did not support or oppose an impact on the perceptions of bullying. The assumption being, as found in this study, that school location was not a significant factor in predicting the perceptions of bullying behaviors (Gentry, 2008; Gist, 2012; Gottfredson & Dipietro, 2011). Students in both urban and rural schools share similar perceptions regarding bullying.

Gender. As with the case of school location, the findings in this study regarding the influence of gender were limited. Specifically, the influence of gender was noticed when overall perceptions of bullying were considered (Hypothesis 1). This influence was such that being a female student was related to having higher perceptions of the prevalence of bullying. Similarly, being a male student was significantly related to having higher levels of the perception of aggressive attitudes (Hypothesis 3). However, for the remaining outcomes (bullying by teachers and staff-Hypothesis 2; bullying experiences-Hypothesis 4), gender did not appear to be particularly useful when predicting students' perceptions. The findings in this study were similar to previous findings, indicating females were more sensitive to the prevalence of bullying (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010), and males were more likely to notice aggressive behaviors (Taylor, 2009). However, the findings here differ in that they suggest a relatively less important role for gender, especially when compared to school climate.

Ethnicity. A particularly interesting finding in this study was that knowing students' ethnicities (Caucasian or Non-Caucasian) did not provide a statistically or

important contribution to the explanation of their perceptions of bullying outcomes. This lack of importance was uniform across all four bullying perception outcomes investigated in this study: prevalence of bullying (Hypothesis 1), bullying by teachers and staff (Hypothesis 2), aggressive attitudes (Hypothesis 3), and bullying experiences (Hypothesis 4). These findings support the conclusion of Konold et al. (2016) that students of all ethnicities benefited from an authoritative school climate. All students, regardless of ethnicity, are successful when the school climate provides high discipline structure and high student support. In an authoritative school climate, the ethnicity of Grade 7 students did not influence perceptions of bullying.

Conclusions

The findings in this study have led to a modification of the original conceptual framework (see Figure 1) regarding the relationship between perceptions of bullying by Grade 7 students in Arkansas as influenced by school climate variables and demographic characteristics (see Figure 2).

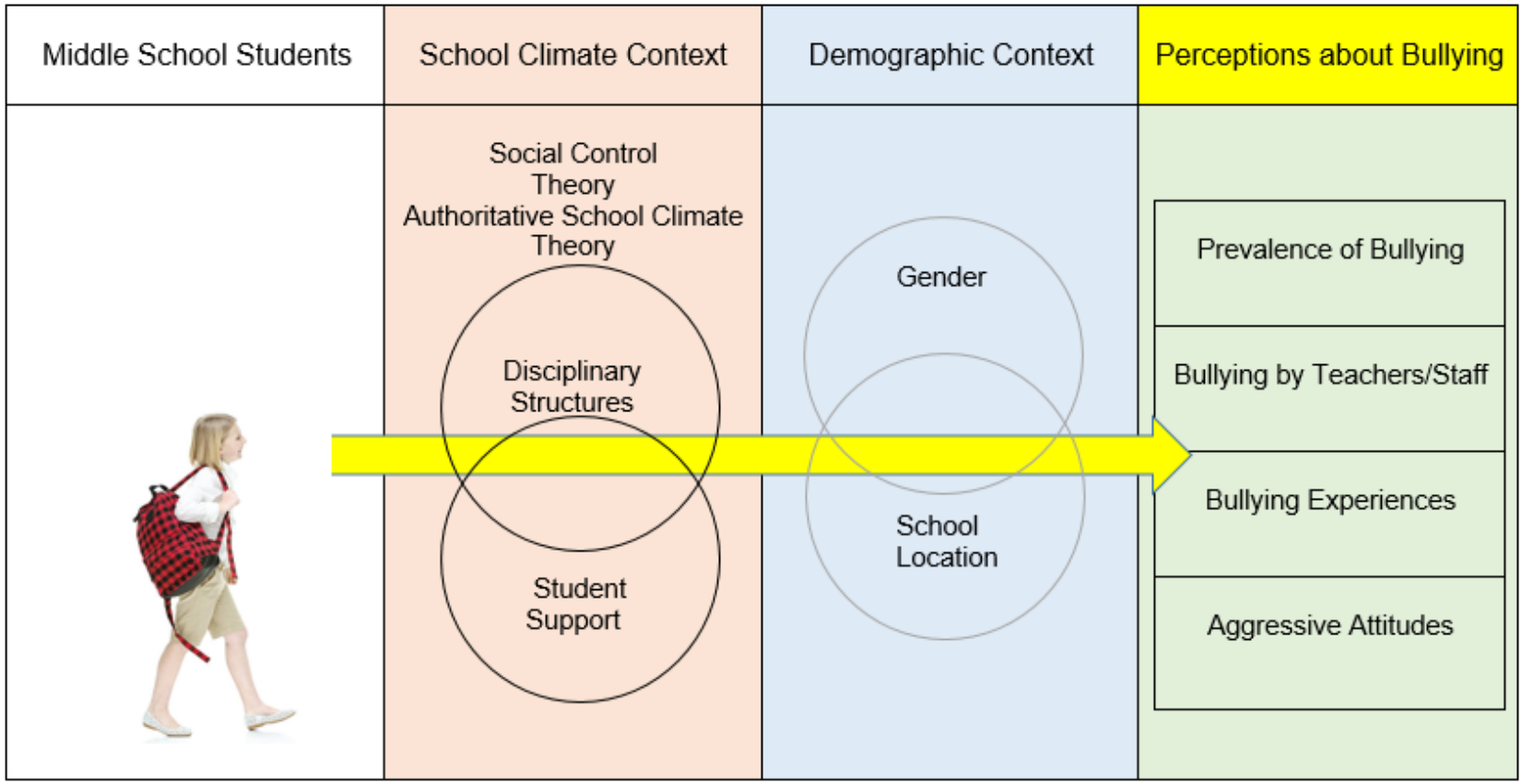

Figure 2. The revised conceptual framework of Grade 7 students' perceptions of bullying as influenced by school climate and demographic variables.

This revised framework takes into account the dominant influence of school climate in predicting perceptions of bullying across all the outcomes investigated in this study.

Implications

One important implication of this study is that this sheds light on a critical issue affecting school-age students in the United States. It is unfortunate that any group of students should have high perceptions of the prevalence of bullying at their schools. Even more unfortunate, students have such perceptions regarding their teachers and staff at their schools. The findings in this study, though mixed, have meaningful implications for educators, educational administrators, and policymakers.

First and foremost, these findings provide empirical evidence that supports the Authoritative School Climate theory by determining that perceptions of an authoritative climate indeed influenced students' perceptions of bullying behaviors. Gregory et al. (2011) and Voight (2013) claimed that authoritative schools were structured to provide positive school climates in which students were supported with clear academic and behavioral expectations. Students scored both discipline structure and student support high in the four districts used in this study, indicating that students perceived these districts as already providing authoritative climates. This finding is important to consider because an authoritative school climate would be the first step school administrators would seek in order to defuse bullying behaviors, confirming that school climate may be as important as selecting the right curriculum for student learning. School administrators should work hard to maintain or build an authoritative school climate to reduce perceptions of bullying.

Another important implication of this study is that an authoritative school climate positively impacts school location, gender, and ethnicity. In other words, authoritative school climates appear to support students of all three investigated. School administrators have no need to consider special interventions to create climates that are overly sensitive to school location, gender, or even ethnic and cultural variations, so long as the school climate is by nature authoritative. By appearance, the benefits of the structure in authoritative school climates subsume the challenges that are normally posed in diverse population school settings.

Finally, these findings imply that school administrators and teacher preparatory programs should attend to school climate and bullying. Administrators in training and pre-service teachers must be educated in the importance of building and maintaining conducive climates within their classrooms and schools. This study determined that school climate influences perceptions of bullying; therefore, by helping educators effectively attend to this, a focus on educating youth instead of an emphasis on negative behaviors can occur.

Demographic factors in this study had no influence on the prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff and bullying experiences. Therefore, school administrators should focus their interventions and policies on improving overall climate in lieu of using valuable resources and energies trying to overcompensate for differences between teachers, students, and staff in demographic characteristics (school location, gender, and ethnicity).

Recommendations

Potential for Practice/Policy

This study investigated the perceptions of school climate in order to inform school administrators about the importance of an authoritative school climate. The researcher found authoritative school climates were statistically significant in reducing the perception of bullying in four scales: the prevalence of bullying, the prevalence of bullying by teachers/staff, self-reported aggressive attitudes, and self-reported bullying experiences. The following recommendations presented the importance of authoritative school climates in reducing bullying behaviors and providing learning environments that promote student success.

First, school administrators must place a high importance on maintaining or building an authoritative school climate to ensure low perceptions of bullying. When perceptions of bullying decrease, students feel safe; therefore, based on Maslow (1943), students will be more successful, engage in school activities, and become self-sufficient members of society. School administrators should strive to frequently engage all stakeholders connected to their buildings, including students, teachers, parents, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria personnel, and community. Building positive relationships will provide school administrators opportunities to monitor perceptions of the school climate.

A second recommendation is that school administrators must acknowledge the need for students to interact and feel connected to authoritative environments outside of the structure of school in order to survive and thrive (Laursen, 2014). This connection to society also ensures mental and social stability throughout adulthood (Laursen, 2014).

This connection to society can be found in a variety of programs such as youth centers, libraries, sporting events, and parks. Another way for schools to connect to the community would be through project-based learning experiences. These experiences allow students to gain content knowledge by working collaboratively to investigate a challenge within their community. These type of experiences grant another connection to an authoritative climate.

Likewise, school administrators should encourage students to stand against bullying behaviors, not only to other students but to teachers and staff as well. Siu et al. (2012) supported the diffusion of responsibility phenomenon by stating witnesses are under the belief that others present will or should take action, implying the accountability a witness feels to intervene will decrease among groups of three or more. School administrators could develop a bystander's courage to intercede through the teaching and practice of tolerance. The American Psychological Association (n.d.) reported that differences are respected and appreciated among others when tolerance is taught as the standard in the classroom. In this study, the researcher found that demographic factors had little influence on bullying behaviors; therefore, teaching tolerance applies to all students regardless of demographic differences. Tolerance, the understanding and valuing of others, is a lifelong skill that will benefit all members of society. Children's books, websites, and anti-bullying programs should be used to empower students to stand against bullying behaviors; yet, the best strategy would be practice. Learning how to express thoughts and feelings verbally should be encouraged and practiced repeatedly within the classroom.

Finally, colleges of education should make instruction about school climate and bullying behaviors a key part of administrator and teacher preparation. Colleges and universities should develop a curriculum that instructs pre-service teachers in how to build and maintain an authoritative school climate for their classrooms. Standard 5 of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015) instructs educational leaders to be effective in cultivating an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community, promoting academic success and emotional well-being of each student. Learning how to provide an authoritative classroom is extremely critical in preparing pre-service teachers and administrators. The fundamental elements of authoritative school climates, discipline structure and student support, must be explained and practiced until educators feel confident with their implementation.

Future Research Considerations

Some of the findings in this study help to explain the influences on seventh-grade students' perceptions of bullying. However, much work needs to be done to understand the phenomenon better. Further research into students' perceptions of bullying, perceptions of bullying by teachers/staff, aggressive attitudes, and bullying experiences is needed. In order to fully understand these influential factors, recommendations for further investigation are as follows.

1. An investigation of high school students should be conducted. Limited research exists about the perceptions of bullying behaviors at the high school level with the majority in the pre-technology era. Another researcher may find value in examining cyberbully with this age group to determine whether an authoritative climate significantly influences this type of bullying behavior.

2. A researcher could investigate the socioeconomic status of students. Because the combination of demographic factors used in this study (school location, gender, and ethnicity) was limited in influence, a researcher might consider researching the socioeconomic status of students to determine its influence.
3. A multi-year study could focus on female or male students in regard to cyberbullying. A recommendation would be to follow a cohort of females or males through adolescence to analyze perceptions of bullying behaviors with a focus on cyberbullying as they age.
4. A researcher could explore how authoritative school climates are developed and sustained over time. A researcher might want to interview building administrators where both teachers and students perceive the school climate as authoritative. This may provide insight as to how an authoritative school climate can be developed and maintained in training future instructional leaders.
5. A study that examines teacher perceptions might also be valuable. A researcher may want to use the teacher-version of the ASCS to determine the influence of school climate on bullying behaviors from teachers' perceptions.

Authoritative school climates provide the nurturing environment where students feel safe to thrive in their education (Thapa et al., 2012). According to Cornell et al. (2016), students in authoritative school climates demonstrate higher levels of engagement, achievement, and aspirations. In authoritative climates, students are not worried about failing in front of their teachers or peers because mistakes are viewed as part of learning. Various activities and programs that encourage students to get involved

provide students with a sense of belonging to the larger community (Halstead, 2015; Katz & Porath, 2011). Student achievement and development are, of course, important; however, the most significant conclusion this researcher found was that authoritative school climates reduced perceptions of bullying behaviors. In authoritative school climates, students are encouraged to appreciate differences among themselves because tolerance is expected (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Now is the time for educators to create an environment that educates and prepares the next generation by teaching them tolerance and respect as well as academics.

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APPENDIX

HARDING UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Status of Request for Exemption from IRB Review

(For Board Use Only)

Date: 4/18/17
Proposal Number: 2017-050
Title of Project: The Influence of School Climate and Demographic Factors on Seventh Grade Students' Perceptions of Bullying in Arkansas Public Schools
Principal Investigator(s) and Co-Investigator(s): Kelly Powell kpowell@harding.edu

■ Research exempted from IRB review.

☐ Research requires IRB review.

☐ More information is needed before a determination can be made. (See attachment.)

I have reviewed the proposal referenced above and have rendered the decision noted above.
This study has been found to fall under the following exemption(s):

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ■ 5 ☐ 6 ☐

In the event that, after this exemption is granted, this research proposal is changed, it may require a review by the full IRB. In such case, a ***Request for Amendment to Approved Research*** form must be completed and submitted.

This exemption is granted for one year from the date of this letter. Renewals will need to be reviewed and granted before expiration.

The IRB reserves the right to observe, review and evaluate this study and its procedures during the course of the study.

Rebecca O. Weaver

Chair
Harding University Institutional Review Board